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English Men of Action

CHARLES GEORGE GORDON

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CHARLES GEORGE GORDON

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CHARLES GEORGE GORDON

B143T

BY

COLONEL SIR WILLIAM F. BUTLER

25533
ac

London
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1889

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CHAPTER I

THE NAME AND THE CLAN—ANCESTORS—BIRTH—EARLY DAYS—ENTERS ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY

GORDON—"Spear," the first weapon shaped by man to aid his fight with nature, and give him dominion over the wild things of plain and forest: the emblem of highest rank among the old Norse gods, held in the right hand of Odin: the weapon of sacrifice among those dim Celtic tribes whose existence is all but lost in the dawn of history—a name that goes back beyond history and beyond even tradition, into days when man began to chip the stones of primæval river-beds into leaf-shaped sharpened flints: a name full of strange significance in our history, whether borne in Norman, Saxon, or Celtic sound, in simple or compound form by priest, poet, or soldier, by Breakspeare, Shakespeare, Byron, or Gordon, by those whose words and deeds have stirred men's blood as none other in our history have done.

An old race, this Gordon, and a stout one: fierce fighters, true soldiers, hard-striking, hard-dying men, whose names crop up wherever fighting is found in their country's history: holding their own, and often their

neighbours' lands and chattels, with a tight grasp, yet ever prodigal of blood and gold for clan and king: smiting Mackays, Crichtons, Sinclairs, Forbes, Camerons, Lindsays, and Macintoshes through the wild straths and glens of Banff, Caithness, and Sutherland until they and their enemies disappear backward into time, amid an unresolvable mist of conflict, where the writ of history does not run.

And downward, into the broader light of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we see these Gordons steadily falling into grander groups, where the issues are faith and king, and the rewards are the prison and the block; their names standing out in times of political storm like guiding lights that tell us, without further need of search, where the old landmarks lie.

He is a Gordon who rallies round him whatever is left in Scotland of loyalty and honour, when the preaching of Knox, the intrigues of Cecil, and the murders of Murray have upset the throne of Mary Stuart, and all but brought Scotland under the dominion of Elizabeth.

A Gordon is the first to raise the royal standard for Charles, and one of the last to lay his head on the block at the Market Cross of Edinburgh, telling his enemies that "the only regret he has in dying is that he had not been the first to suffer in a cause which made death so sweet to him;" and also telling the Covenanting ministers, who came at the last moment to pester him with offers of their absolution if he would acknowledge his "treason" to them, that "as he had never been accustomed in life to give ear to false prophets, so now he did not wish to be troubled by them at his death."

The Marquis of Huntly, whose spirit neither disaster

nor imprisonment could subdue, was not the only Gordon who suffered at the Market Cross of Edinburgh, and the footsteps of three of his best friends and leading gentlemen of the clan—Gordon of Invermarkie, Gordon of Newton Gordon, and Gordon of Harthill—had already made easier for their chief the pathway to the scaffold.

How many had fallen fighting under Montrose will never be known, but almost the entire loss suffered by the royal army in the brilliant victory of Alford was borne by the Gordons; and it was there that the hope and pride of the clan, the man whom Montrose called his "only friend," Huntly's eldest son, Lord Gordon, fell at the moment he was dragging the Covenanting general from his saddle.

But, with all its native feuds and quarrels, Scotland in the seventeenth century could not find room for the warlike proclivities of the Gordon race. The cadets of the clan were to be found in the armies of Sweden, France, Spain, and the Empire. Four of them rose to high rank in the service of Gustavus Adolphus, another became a general in the Russian service, and another left his name for ever associated with the dark scene in the Castle of Eger on February 25th, 1634.

After the Stuart cause went finally out in a last blaze of fruitless victory at Killiecrankie, William of Orange was too good a soldier and too astute a politician not to see that the Highland broadsword was an excellent weapon, provided he could only manage to keep it always smiting his enemies; but knowing that it had a second edge which might be disastrously turned against himself, he immediately began to adopt towards the Highlanders a triple policy of treachery,

bribery, and emigration. He caused the Macdonalds to be massacred; he gave twenty thousand pounds to Breadalbane to be distributed among the chiefs; and he raised several regiments of Highland dragoons to fight his battles in the Low Countries. Of the prowess of these last mentioned "emigrants," who were not intended, if it could be helped, to be let back again into the Highlands, we get a glimpse in the pages of Evelyn, under date April 1694: "Some regiments of Highland dragoons were on their march through England. They were of large stature, well-proportioned, and disciplined. One of them, having reproached a Dutchman for cowardice in the late fight, was attacked by two Dutchmen, when with his sword he struck off the head of one and cleft the skull of the other to the chin." Truly this claymore was a weapon to be taken away as soon as possible from the hands of such a people. But it was one thing to pass an Arms Act in Westminster, and another to enforce disarmament among the rude "clachans" of the clansmen, and in the castles where the chiefs still held their own, "hard by thundering Spey." Rusty flint-lock or cumbrous horse-pistol might be given up, for the true Highlander had for such arms almost as great contempt as the Arab of the desert has to-day for musket or rifle; but the broadsword, the weapon of his heart and hand, he would keep to the death. And it must be admitted that he had some reason to love this claymore. "Keep a tight hold of the hilt of the sword, and a loose one of the mouth of the purse," had been his old motto in days when the sword had filled the purse; and he possessed a very shrewd idea that to give up the sword, even though it no longer filled his purse, was also to

abandon home and clan. So, despite Arms Act or disarmament order, the Highlander held on to his claymore. And he was not mistaken in the weapon of his choice, even though his love for it had been laid in times when it was the acknowledged and unrivalled Queen of Arms —long before the days of arquebus, snaphaunce, or flint-gun. In 1745 a body of Highlanders, numbering less than two thousand men, utterly routed and destroyed in five minutes' fighting a force of old and seasoned regular troops, fresh from the Flemish wars, capturing guns, camp, and baggage, killing or taking prisoners more than two thousand infantry, and doing it all so instantaneously that the second line of clansmen, placed only fifty paces in rear of the first, and following that first line in its charge as fast as Highland legs could run, never got blow of sword or scythe (for many of the men had taken scythes for want of swords) at the English enemy, and had to content themselves with prisoners and plunder. Of these there were ample for all—standards, tents, military chest, together with fifteen hundred prisoners of the foot regiments of Lee, Lascelles, and Murray, were taken on the field. Among the officers thus captured at Gladsmuir, as the victors called the field of battle, there was one David Gordon, a Highlander, serving in the regiment known as Lascelles's Foot. It is the life of the great-grandson of this man that I now propose to write.

How David Gordon came to be an officer fighting on the side which, whatever were its merits, was certainly not the side of his family and clan, is a thing now quite impossible to know; but, as he had been in Lascelles's regiment for at least seven years earlier, it is probable that the practice of seeking for soldiers in the Highlands,

which William of Orange had begun, was continued during the succeeding half century. Certain is it that the army, which was raised at the breaking out of the European war of 1740, held a large number of Northern Scotch in its ranks, and that the "rear lorn" guard which covered the wreck of Cumberland's army in the disastrous day at Fontenoy was wholly composed of Highlanders. David Gordon, taken prisoner at Gladsmuir, could scarcely have found his captivity irksome to him. He was certainly not a prisoner among strangers, for his nearest relatives and great numbers of his clan were fighting in the army of the Pretender. Six hundred of them fought at Falkirk: there were two regiments of Gordons at Culloden—Lord Lewis Gordon and five chiefs, Sir William Gordon of Park, Gordon of Killihuntly, Gordon of Cobardie, Gordon of Abachie, and the veteran septuagenarian Gordon of Glenbucket followed to the end the fortunes of the prince whom they believed to be their rightful king.

How many Gordons perished in the butcheries and the burnings that followed the defeat of the clans at Culloden will never be known: it is the victor who writes the history and counts the dead, and to the vanquished in such a struggle there only remains the dull memory of an unnumbered and unwritten sorrow. But if the record of the red-handed vengeance taken on the Highlanders in their native glens in the long months of devastation that followed Culloden be wanting, the judicial horrors perpetrated by the Royal Commissions at Carlisle and York upon the Jacobite prisoners give us a fair standard by which to judge what the others must have been. Among the sixty individuals who

suffered at York and Carlisle in the last months of 1746, undergoing, without one exception, with the utmost fortitude the cruel sentences of hanging, cutting down, beheading and disembowelling, the name of Gordon appears twice—at York in November, and at Carlisle in December 1746—and in each case the Christian name, curiously enough, is Charles. A year later the Government, tired of bloodshed, passed an Act of Indemnity, but excluded from the benefit of the Act some eighty persons. Among these appear the names of Lord Lewis Gordon, Sir William Gordon of Park, Gordon of Abachie, and Gordon of Glenbucket, all of whom died in exile.

Six years after the battle of Culloden, David Gordon, still of Lascelles's regiment, died at Halifax, Nova Scotia, a far-away spot in those days from the old land at home. He left an only son, called after the Duke of Cumberland, William Augustus,—whatever side the Highlander was on, there was no half-hearted loyalty about him.

The prospect before the boy must have seemed blank enough to the dying officer, for the feeling against the clans still ran high, and the change of sentiment which Chatham was to bring about in the next war had not yet begun. Whether it was that the thoughts of the dying Highlander turned naturally to the old home and people, or that he wished his boy to know where he could find a friend in case the whirligig of fate should bring back the Stuarts, it is needless now to inquire, but we are told that David Gordon on his deathbed named Sir William Gordon of Park as the nearest surviving relative his son would have—not much of a stay for the boy so soon to be an orphan. Sir William

Gordon of Park held a commission as lieutenant-colonel of Lord Ogilvy's regiment in the French service, and at the time when David Gordon was dying at Halifax Sir William had been already gathered to his rest at Douay, where his regiment lay in garrison. In the Stuart papers there are three letters from officers of the regiment of Ogilvy to the Chevalier de Saint Georges, dated June 1751, announcing the death of Sir William Gordon, and asking that the vacant commission may be given to them.

But, however dark might have appeared the prospects of the young orphan in Halifax, Nova Scotia, fortune proved kind to him. He got his "pair of colours" while yet a mere boy, and before he had reached his twentieth year had already seen much service. He was at Louisburg in 1758, and a year later stood in the memorable fight on the plains of Abraham. After this the way was smooth. The Seven Years' War had changed the sentiment of suspicion towards Highlanders into admiration of their courage and devotion. Chatham's glowing panegyric upon the virtues of the clansmen was echoed by the general voice of the nation, who began to be ashamed of the "jealousy" he had so loftily denounced. An officer of a line regiment, writing of the behaviour of the "Scots Highlanders in the late bloody affair," the defeat at Ticonderoga in 1758, says: "With a mixture of esteem, grief, and envy, I consider the great loss and immortal glory acquired by them. They appeared like lions breaking from their chains. . . . There is much harmony and friendship between us. . . ."

But other causes besides heroic courage on foreign fields were at work at home to change into kinder feelings the national sentiment regarding the Highlanders. In

1750 Mack-Donell, as he signs himself, of Glengarry writes to Cardinal York asking that a relic of the wood of the Cross may be given him, saying, "I more boldly solicit your Royal Eminence for this, as our name is the only Catholic one now in Scotland *since the family of Gordon changed*, and thereby I may say in Britain, that without any mask has preserved the true religion since they first embraced Christianity."

In the year that Quebec was taken, the Dowager-Duchess of Gordon raised a new regiment in Lochaber for service in the Seven Years' War, and henceforth the name figures often in army-lists and becomes conspicuous in the battle-fields of America and India during the remainder of the eighteenth century.

Henceforward it is plain sailing for William Augustus. He does not appear to have seen service subsequent to the Seven Years' War, but he has powerful friends, is in active correspondence with Lord Chatham, marries in 1773, and becomes the father of a large family, among his children being one, William Henry, born in the year 1786. Continuing the old military tradition of the race, William Henry became in due time an officer of artillery, fought at Maida, where the steady fire of the field-artillery did much in the earlier part of the action to throw the French line into confusion, and finally rose to the rank of lieutenant-general, dying at an advanced age in 1865. He left many children by his wife, Elizabeth Enderby, whom he married in the year 1817. Among these children was one, a son, Charles George, born in Woolwich on January 28th, 1833, destined to die at Khartoum fifty-two years later, all but two days. It is of his life that this book would attempt to tell.

The early years in the life of a man whose name becomes famous after he has passed middle age are difficult fields of search for those who would like to trace their hero through every scene of his journey from the cradle to the grave, and who believe that the head and heart will always be found to show through childhood, boyhood, and youth the ever-deepening lines of character which in the end have made him celebrated. Most of the contemporaries of youth have passed away, and the memories of those who still remain have lost the recollection of days so far removed from them. It is the mother who watches and notes the dawn and growth of the child's ideas, and preserves the memory of traits that to others are unnoticed, but when the half-hundredth year of man's life is past, she who "kept all these things in her heart" has in most cases long gone to her rest.

Of the childhood of Charles Gordon we know very little beyond the bare record of the places in which it was spent. The Pigeon House Fort in the Bay of Dublin, Leith Fort, and the Island of Corfu were the scenes of the first ten years of his life. All these places possess that highest charm of every age and that best teacher of early age, beauty of scenery, fairness of the outward form of the earth as it lies in far expanse of sea, long line of shore, or bold outline of mountain-top—these are the early scenes that smoke of city and gloom of after-life can never blur, and these were the pictures upon which the boy's eyes must most have dwelt whenever he looked from window or gun-embrasure upon the surroundings of his childhood.

From Leith to Prestonpans is but a short distance, and, no doubt, the first field of battle the boy ever

saw was the one where, ninety-three years earlier, his great-grandfather had been taken prisoner by his own people. Timid and sensitive as a child, and easily frightened by the discharge of cannon (an occurrence which his father's profession must necessarily have made almost an everyday event), the boy, nevertheless, grew with years into marked determination and an independence of thought that seemed to his relations to promise ill for his success in life.

One or two incidents of those early days are yet remembered, which seem to have had in them the germs of a nature afterwards to be noticeable enough. At Corfu, when only nine years of age, he used frequently to fling himself into deep water, although quite unable to swim, trusting to some older companion to take him out. Again, at Woolwich, a few years later, it is told of him that being once threatened with deprivation of a promised visit to a great circus in London on account of some offence for which he did not think himself responsible, he afterwards stubbornly refused to be taken to the treat, and persisted in his refusal to the end.

At ten years of age he was sent to school at Taunton, where he remained until 1848, when he entered as a cadet the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, an institution which had for governor at that period an old Waterloo veteran, who had lost a leg in the campaign of 1815. Gordon was now sixteen years of age, a youth full of animal spirits, hating every semblance of injustice, and not at all given to bow down before the outer signs and tokens of authority—somewhat inclined, indeed, to hold them cheaply, and by no means impressed by the formidable aspect of government as it was personified in

the governor. "Never employ any one minus a limb to be in authority over boys," he used to say in after-life: "they are apt to be irritable and unjust."

He remained at the Military Academy four years, having been put back six months for his commission on account of some trifling breach of discipline. He appears not to have been at all anxious about entering the army, and it is curious to notice how frequently in later life he expresses his complete carelessness as to remaining in the service.

During the years between 1848 and 1852 there was little indeed to fire the imagination of a young soldier. The long peace which had followed Waterloo seemed yet unbroken: military service presented a monotonous aspect of garrison-routine varied only by change of station. It is true that Paris had spoken in 1848; and although her voice had sufficed to make half the kings of Europe pull out from under their thrones the Constitutions which they had put away thirty-three years before, no one seemed to think that the utterance meant more than a passing storm, and all believed that things would lapse back again into the accustomed quiet.

Stopping a moment in the course of our narrative, and letting thought travel off through space in this year 1848, when the boy-cadet has for the first time put on the military uniform, we see the forces that are to mould his life in the future beginning to assume shape. The long peace is virtually over. The most glaring wrongs of the Treaty of Vienna are being undone. Italy is in revolt against Austria: the Latin races are in ferment, and the contagion of their movement is spreading over the Rhine and beyond the Alps. For a

moment it looks as though the Revolution has suddenly burst forth over three parts of Europe, with a fury that will sweep before it every throne save that of Russia. And yet it was upon Russia that the revolutionary outburst of 1848 was destined indirectly to leave the most lasting impression. It diverted the gaze of her despotic ruler from his old enemy the Turk, who in this convulsion of Europe stood alone. The armies of the Czar must first stifle the Revolution in Hungary. Five years later, when his columns can turn their attention towards Constantinople, the opportunity has passed away, and the "sick man" has got powerful supporters to keep him longer on his legs. And, going off in thought beyond the horizon of Europe, we see in this year, 1848, a year of beginnings destined to bear a strange share in the life of the obscure Woolwich cadet. In a small river-island far up the Nubian Nile an Arab child is born into the world about this time. Thirty-six years later the lines of these two lives will come together, and at the place where they meet that prayer so often to be uttered by Gordon in the lone spaces of his life, "May I be ground to dust if He will but glorify Himself in me," will find its answer.

In the middle of the year 1852 young Gordon obtained his commission as a second lieutenant of engineers. To his father this appointment was a much greater source of satisfaction than it was to himself. "While he is in the Academy I feel I am like one sitting on a powder-barrel," the old officer used to say. He knew the fierce impatience that was in his son if wrong or injustice were put upon the boy; but he did not know that beneath the spirit of hatred against authority wrongly used there lay a nature certain to be great, whether any letters of

rank or profession were coupled or were not coupled with his name. This unnoticed boy was of the stuff which no profession can add honour to, but which can do much to honour what it touches.

Then after Woolwich came Chatham, where the young officer was still further to learn the lessons of the Master of the Art of Defence, so great in greater things than siege or safe keeping of cities. Perhaps in the library of the barracks or on the old lines of Brompton the young sapper read the lesson that Vauban has left in his letter to Louvois—a lesson of deeper meaning in the safe keeping of the citadel of self than any of his famous "systems." "For I dare plainly to tell you," wrote the veteran (marshal of France at last after his fifty-three sieges) to the all-powerful Minister, "that in a question of strictest honesty and sincere fidelity I fear neither the king, nor you, nor all the human race together. Fortune had me born the poorest gentleman in France, but in requital she honoured me with an honest heart, so free from all sorts of swindles that it cannot bear even the thought of them without a shudder."

CHAPTER II

CRIMEA—BESSARABIA—ARMENIA

CHARLES GORDON was twenty-one years of age on January 28th, 1854. It was a good year for a young soldier to begin the life of a man. The long peace was over: the Russians had passed the Pruth and crossed the Danube: Silistria was besieged: Omar Pasha was a popular favourite; and two English officers, who had gone as volunteers to assist the garrison of Silistria in its defence against General Luders, were the heroes of the hour.

Looking back on that time from to-day it is not easy to understand the state of the public mind at the moment the nation was about to enter upon a great struggle with Russia.

England was entirely unprepared for war. Waterloo had not only put an end to the necessity of keeping the fighting force of the kingdom in anything like readiness to take the field, but it had done what was far more harmful, it had allowed men to believe that our system, or rather our want of system, was the right thing, and that we had only to put twenty thousand or thirty thousand men on a foreign shore and they would at once proceed to do the rest. The military system which Wellington had

slowly created was a personal one. It had been evolved by his strong practical mind out of the lessons of many fruitless campaigns and abortive expeditions, the very names of which are now forgotten, and the records of which have to be sought for in the by-ways of history, and it had been proved and made perfect in the five years' fighting that lay between Talavera and Toulouse. But perfect though it was both in its tactical and administrative branches, it was a purely personal system, an unwritten law of the organisation of an army and of the art of war, that died with the man who had devised it.

That part of this system which lay within the scope of the regimental or subordinate staff-officer had indeed been continued in a very high state of perfection. The drill, the discipline, the manual exercises of firing, the art of moving on parade, the interior economy of the troops in barrack and cantonment had never been more striking in their order and regularity; but the larger staff-organisation, the harmony of many parts working towards a common purpose, the exact measure and proportion of separate departmental responsibility, the avenues along which the central authority reaches its destination by the most direct means, and the vast and complicated system by which an army in the field is fed, moved, and kept in health—these vital principles of war had become almost a forgotten science in the forty years' inaction that followed Waterloo. Hence it had come about that, when the drift of events in the East in 1853 ran us quickly into conflict with Russia, our military system was totally unprepared for the strain about to be imposed upon it.

The army that sailed from Great Britain and Ireland

for the East in the early half of 1854 was the most brilliant fighting force that had ever left our shores. It was composed of soldiers of a type and bearing now rarely to be seen, men of tall stature, sinewy frame, well-chiselled features, keen glance, and elastic figure, the pick and flower of a population still chiefly a rural one, before emigration and the competition of great railways in the labour-market had relegated the recruiting sergeant to lower levels in the social strata. Whatever troops could do when put face to face with an enemy these men were sure to do; but many things have to happen in war before this point is attained, and the fortune of a campaign depends quite as much upon the proper execution of these things as upon the actual fighting power of the men in the ranks. In the absence of staff-organisation, transport-trains, and efficient machinery of supply, the magnificent veteran battalions that formed the army of the Crimea went for the most part to graves which were dug for them by other agencies than those of the bullets and bayonets of their enemies. It is curious to trace in the diaries and letters of some subordinate actor in the Crimean drama the palpable evidence of our unreadiness for war, all the more convincing in its testimony because it does not appear to be conscious of the moral which the writer is at the moment pointing. Throughout the greater portion of 1854 young Gordon, now a first lieutenant of engineers, was in garrison at Pembroke Dock. In his letters to his family, then in Gibraltar, he speaks of the trouble arising from the frequent changes of uniform recently ordered. Among many other long-ridden hobbies clothing and equipment were then undergoing a vigorous process of

"swopping" at the moment the animals were in the midstream of the siege of Sebastopol.

In December Gordon announces that he has suddenly received orders to proceed to the Crimea in charge of wooden huts for the troops. The soldiers were already beginning to die of exposure to cold on the bleak plateau above Sebastopol, but the huts were only leaving England at Christmas. Having put his wooden planks on board colliers in Portsmouth, working at the task, he tells us, from morn to night, Gordon started overland through France for Constantinople. This work of loading the colliers was destined to find strange repetition thirty years later. In the autumn of 1884 men were at work from morn to night at this same Portsmouth wharf, loading vessels with wooden boats instead of wooden huts, the object being to save the life of this lieutenant of engineers. Both labours were in vain. The huts reached their destination after the army they were to shelter was in its grave: the boats gained the smooth water above the cataracts of the Nile when all was over in Khartoum.

In mid-December Gordon left England, reached Lyons by railway, took steamer thence for Valence, and by rail to Marseilles, where he arrives on the night of the sixteenth, "very tired," but not too tired to sit up and write a letter to his mother, telling her of what he has seen on his journey, "the pretty towns and villages, vineyards and rivers, with glimpses of snowy mountains beyond." In this letter from Marseilles we see the earliest indication of that steadfast faith which in after years is to be the mainspring of his character. He is to leave Marseilles, "*D.V.*, on Monday for Constantinople."

On New Year's Day, 1855, he arrives at Balaklava. It is the depth of the disaster of the winter. One of Russia's two greatest generals has begun his work; and although the young sapper, down in the sheltered harbour of Balaklava, where his duty at first keeps him employed, sees nothing, and hears little of what is going on six miles away on the heights, there are many significant passages in his letters. "I have not yet seen Sebastopol," he writes on January 3d, "and do not hear anything about the siege. We hear a gun now and then. No one seems to interest himself about the siege, but all appear to be engaged in foraging for grub." Yes, all the tinsel was off by this time; and that splendid army which six short months before had left our shores, so full of light-hearted hope and anticipation of easy conquest, was now reduced to look for what food it could pick up among the mud of Balaklava. Two days later he says: "We have only put up two huts as yet, but hope to do better soon." The cold is intense: General Janvier is already beginning to show results. "Lieutenant Daunt, Ninth Regiment, and another officer of some Sixtieth Regiment, were frozen to death last night, and two officers of the Ninety-third Regiment were smothered by charcoal. The streets of Balaklava are a sight, with swell English cavalry and horse-artillery carrying rations, and officers in every conceivable costume foraging for eatables."[1]

Another ten days go by, and for the first time Gordon gets a glimpse of the besieged town. "I do not think I ever saw a prettier city," he says, "it looks quite open, and a Russian steamer was cruising about inside the

[1] *General Gordon's Letters from the Crimea:* London 1884.

harbour." Then comes a bit of news that would seem to imply that the sailors in the Fleets outside the harbour had turned into their hammocks for the remainder of the winter. "Two of their [the Russian] steamers came out the other day and bombarded the French lines for two hours, but our vessels were unable to move out to attack them, as steam was not up. For the future it will always be up."

And so with many little glimpses of work and weather, camp and trench, sap and sortie, the great siege drags its slow length along through the mud and misery of the winter. February comes, the Russians have actually advanced their lines and are throwing up batteries six hundred yards in front of their old works. "Our army is a mere handful. The railway progresses slowly." Writing on February 1st, he thinks "it will be complete in three weeks." The winter is breaking up, he hopes, "as young grass and crocuses are appearing," but further on he begs that his bad writing may be excused, "as my ink is frozen, and getting a dip breaks the nib of my pen." March comes, the Russians are still advancing, they have made another battery three hundred yards in advance of the last one. "This looks serious;" and very serious it proved. While the French and English engineers had been for months blindly wasting their efforts along a front of eight miles, digging and mining in a hundred places, the great Russian engineer had found the real key of the city and forts on the south side of the harbour, and the batteries which late in February the besieged began to erect in advance of their original line of defence were afterwards, under the names of Mamelon and Malakoff, to become the keys of the fortress.

Painful is it to trace through the letters of the young engineer in the off moments of his rest the unmistakable evidence of deterioration in the material from which the nation had now to supply the losses at Alma, Inkermann, and Balaklava, and the still greater ravage which cold, hunger, and exposure had made in the splendid army which seven months earlier had left our shores.

Spring came, the weather was splendid, the men were "healthy and well-fed," guns fired, trenches were dug, mine and countermine, sap, siege, and sortie went on, but all the same there was something missing; that something was indeed there too, but it was lying under the turf of Inkermann, or beneath the mounds that stood so thick on Cathcart's Hill.

At length the moment for the great assault came. At three in the morning of June 17th all the vast array of guns and mortars, most of them of the largest calibre then existing, opened fire along a front of six miles. This terrific storm of shot and shell was continued without a break all through the day. The Russian guns at first replied slowly, then ceased their fire almost wholly. From half-past two in the morning of the 17th until seven in the evening Gordon had been on duty in the trenches—sixteen and a half hours, "rather a long spell" he calls it. Returning to the camp he has something to eat, and finds an order awaiting him to go down again at midnight to the right attack. Upon reaching the trenches he finds the columns mustering for the assault: there are six other engineer subaltern officers and three captains. There are to be three columns of assault—one for the

salient of the Redan, the other two to take the right and left flanks of that work. In silence they reach their respective points within the advanced trenches, and sit down to await the signal which is to send so many of them to death.

The short summer night is still over land and sea: the lines, the batteries, and the forts are silent. If some mental process could be discovered by which the workings of a human brain could be read in moments such as this, as the electric machine tells off the letters on the telegraph-tape, what a curious study it would be! Waiting for the assault,—each human being busy with the world of his memory: no sight or sound to take thought away from the vast problem: darkness islanding each atom from the community of thought and companionship of feeling which light and sight give to men bound upon a common danger. What earthly chord it is that at such moments touches deepest the hearts of men, an incident, which happened a little distance away from the spot where Charles Gordon sat on that June morning, will best show.

On the left attack, at the head of the South creek, we were to make a feint attack upon the Russian batteries known as the Spur and Cemetary redoubts. When the column which was to deliver this attack was drawn up waiting for the moment to move forward, the general officer commanding it addressed a few words to the leading battalion—the Eighteenth Royal Irish Regiment.

He told the men to carry themselves in the coming assault "so that the mud cabins in their native land would ring at the news," and so truly did those words

strike the hearts of the men who listened to them that, despite the caution of silence, a loud cheer broke from the battalion, and the charge immediately delivered was pressed with such determination that the cemetary and suburb of Sebastopol, adjacent to the creek, were captured. But the position was one which could not be maintained while the Redan remained in the hands of the Russians, and the main assault upon that work had completely failed almost as soon as it was begun. Gordon thus describes this main attack: "About 3 A.M. the French advanced on the Malakoff tower in three columns, and ten minutes after this our signal was given. The Russians then opened with a fire of grape that was terrific." In his report upon the bombardment of the preceding day Gordon had stated that he believed the silence of the Russian guns was owing to the fire being reserved, not silenced. "They mowed down our men in dozens, and the trenches, being confined, were crowded with men who foolishly kept in them instead of rushing over the parapet, and, by coming forward in a mass, trusting to some of them at least being able to pass through untouched to the Redan, where, of course, once they arrived, the artillery could not reach them, and every yard nearer would have diminished the effect of the grape by giving it less space for spreading. We could thus have moved up the supports and carried the place. Unfortunately, however, our men dribbled out of the ends of the trenches ten and twenty at a time, and as soon as they appeared they were cleared away."

The space between the advanced trenches and the Redan was about four hundred yards in length; across this open ground twelve heavy guns vomited grape-shot;

the heads of the three columns withered away before they were well clear of the trenches. One of them indeed, that destined to attack the left flank of the Redan, did succeed in reaching the abattis of the work, but it was the front fringe of the column that got thus far, only to leave its gallant leaders, Jesse and Graves, the most advanced in that densely-filled field of dead.

Thus ended the assault of June 18th. We had lost some fourteen hundred killed and wounded, while our allies, in their fruitless attempt upon the Malakoff, had suffered a loss of four times that number. Over four thousand Russians had fallen in these early morning hours.

A few days later Lord Raglan died. The blow of this failure to carry the place was too much for the old man. The old army was gone, the generals of division were all dead or invalided; it was time for the leader, who forty years earlier had given his right arm in the service of his country, now to add his worn-out frame to the offering.

For three months more the work went on again. Nearly forty times has Gordon been on duty in the trenches, twenty hours each time—"More than a month straight on end," he writes. "It gets tedious after a time, but if anything is going on one does not mind."

The opposing lines of trench and battery are now close together: 68-pounders, 32-pounders, 11 and 13-inch mortars, Lancaster guns, small cohorns, and rifles go on all day long. "When the 13-inch shell drops, you see timber, platforms, men, gabions, etc., all fly up in the air as if a mine had exploded. The Redan looks very

sickly as we fire platoons of musketry all night to prevent the Russians repairing it, and give them shells all day. The Russians repay us with baskets of shells 5½ inch, twelve at a time, each fired from a big mortar. It requires to be lively to get out of their way." The French are losing about a hundred men a day; our loss is a third of that number, but the end is now near.

Writing on August 10th Gordon speaks of another assault as being soon probable. "If this does not succeed I think the raising of the siege not very unlikely, but we know nothing." Not for another month does the second assault take place. It differed from the preceding one in that it was made in noonday, and across a very much narrower space of open ground, but the result was the same as it had been before. "Our men went forward well, losing apparently few, put the ladders in the ditch and mounted on the salient of the Redan, but though they stayed there five minutes or more they did not advance, and tremendous reserves coming up drove them out. They returned well and without disorder, losing in all one hundred and fifty officers and two thousand four hundred men killed and wounded. We should have carried everything before us if the men had only advanced."[1]

Has it ever occurred to the nation to ask itself why the men did not advance? The following extract may give the reason:—

"It is said that as the first rush was made upon the salient of the Redan, three old soldiers of the Forty-first Regiment entered with Colonel Windham. The three men were named Hartnady, Kennedy, and Pat Mahony; the last, a gigantic

[1] *Letters from the Crimea.*

grenadier, was shot dead as he entered, crying 'Come on, boys, come on.' There was more in the dying words of this Celtic grenadier than the mere outburst of his heroic heart. The garret-bred 'boys' would not go on. It is in moments such as this that the cabin on the hillside, the shieling in the Highland glen, become towers of strength to the nation that possess them. It is in moments such as this that between the peasant-born soldier and the man who first saw the light in a crowded 'court,' between the cottier and the coster, there comes that gulf which measures the distance between victory and defeat—Alma and Inkermann on one side, the Redan on June 18th and September 8th on the other."[1]

But the French had taken the Malakoff, and with it went the south side of Sebastopol. Even in this hour of final defeat the genius of the great Russian engineer was conspicuous. He had foreseen everything, he had left nothing to chance. Realising that the Malakoff must fall before the tremendous efforts which the French general was making against it, he had begun a fortnight or three weeks earlier the construction of a floating bridge across the harbour, and all was ready before the final moment came.

On the morning of September 9th, at four o'clock, Gordon plodded the weary way from camp to trenches on duty for the last time. Never before had the famous fortress presented such a sight—"the whole town in flames, and every now and then a terrific explosion."

The sun rose over the scene of ruin as the last of the Russian columns crossed the bridge of boats. The great siege was over. Never had a garrison marched out of the scene of their sufferings heavier loaded with the honour and glory of war. Just eleven months earlier the hero Korniloff, struck down by a cannon shot in the

[1] *A Plea for the Peasant.*

Malakoff bastion, had left a last message to his countrymen: "Now, gentlemen, I leave you to defend Sebastopol. Do not surrender it. Tell all how pleasant it is to die when conscience is at rest."

Truly had the Russian soldiers and sailors kept faith with their dead admiral. Of the ninety thousand men killed and wounded in the eleven months' siege at least half had fallen on or around the Malakoff hill.

Throughout the record that Gordon has left in his letters of the siege of Sebastopol the reader becomes aware of some marked characteristics. First a complete absence of self-praise or anything approaching even to the recital of his own particular doings which a young man writing to his nearest relatives might, without any reproach of vanity, have allowed himself. In all those long hours of duty in the trenches he has a hundred scenes of siege warfare to speak of, but his own part in any event seldom finds relation. Once he gives a bit of detailed experience which shows that early in the siege the quality of our troops had begun to deteriorate:—

"The night of February 14th I was on duty in the trenches. . . . The French that night determined to join their sentries on their right and our sentries on our left in advance of their and our trenches. . . . I got, after some trouble, eight men with picks and shovels, and asked the captain of the advanced trench, Captain —— of the Fourth, to give me five double sentries to throw out in advance. It was the first time he had been on duty here; and, as for myself, I never had, although I kept that to myself. I led forward the sentries, going at the head of the party, and found the sentries of the advance had not held the caves, which they ought to have done after dark, so there was just a chance of the Russians being in them. I went on, however, and though I did not like it, explored the caves almost

alone. We then left two sentries on the hill above the caves, and went back to get round and put two sentries below the caves. However, just as soon as we showed ourselves outside the caves and below them, bang! bang! went two rifles, the bullets hitting the ground close to us. The sentries with me retired in a rare state of mind, and my working-party bolted, and were stopped with great difficulty. What had really happened was this. It was not a Russian attack, but the two sentries whom I had placed above the caves *had fired at us*, lost their caps, and bolted to the trench. Nothing after this would induce the sentries to go out, so I got the working-party to go forward with me. The Russians had, on the report of our shots, sent us a shower of bullets, their picket not being more than a hundred and fifty yards away. I set the men to work, and then went down to the bottom of the ravine, and found the French in strength hard at work also. Having told them who we were, I returned to the trench, where I met Colonel —— of the First Royals. I warned him, if he went out, he would be sure to be hit by his own sentries or the Russians. He would go, however, and a moment afterwards was hit in the breast, the ball going through his coats, slightly grazing his ribs, and passing out again without hurting him. I stayed with my working-party all night, and got home very tired."[1]

Naturally the chief interest in the letters lies in the glimpses they give us of a great historical event as it was seen by a young actor in it, and, turning the telescope the other way, the mind of the young man seen through the memorable event. We read the failure, but its causes are of course unnoticed; a humble actor in the great drama knew little of what was going on beneath the surface.

Of the absence of proper system; single, direct authority in the supply-departments at home; of the confusion resulting from an attempt made at the eleventh hour of

[1] *Letters from the Crimea.*

disaster to create a machinery of war-administration; and of the terrible dangers to the State which lie in the friction between rival authorities at the base, the obscure subaltern of engineers toiling at the far away front naturally knew nothing. It is doubtful if even a tenth part of all these errors was ever known to any one person. In the very wonderment produced by the details of some colossal blunder the main sources of disaster often escape unquestioned. Of the warm clothing put into the same ship that carried ammunition, and hence lost in the great storm of November, because a vessel with ammunition on board would not be allowed to enter the harbour of Balaklava; of the coffee that was first carried to Balaklava and then brought back to Constantinople because it was stored underneath cargo, which could only be unloaded at the latter place; of all the terrible list of stupidity and incompetence that allowed an army to perish of the common needs of food and clothing within five miles of a seaport and within fourteen days' steaming of Portsmouth harbour the nation knew as little after the war, and knows as little to-day, as of the administrative details of the war of the Spanish Succession. Nay, it would be a hopeful thought to think that it even knew as much about the blunders of its servants in 1854-55 as it does about the peculations of its contractors and the corruption of its generals in 1704. If Marlborough was proved to have taken a bribe on every loaf from the Jew baker who supplied the army of Blenheim with bread, and if he "led troops to the slaughter that a great number of officers might thereby be knocked on the head in a battle, or against stone walls, in order to fill his pockets by disposing of their com-

missions," he at least took care that his soldiers should never be without food, and that the battles and the stone walls should be brilliant victories and captured cities.

The war of France and England against Russia in 1854-55 is now far enough removed by time to enable the present generation to estimate at least the main direction of its effect upon history. The general effect of a war is often to produce results totally unlooked for by any of the principals engaged in it. Not only are the original reasons, which were outwardly the cause or the pretence of hostilities, lost sight of, but the secret objects sought for become obscured or lost in the evolution of new issues.

To the three chief powers concerned the war of the Crimea had three negative results. To Russia it brought a delay in her southward march of perhaps twenty years; to her extension eastward it added renewed impetus. The fortress of Sebastopol was a mistake for Russia. Notwithstanding its magnificent harbour and its advantageous position as the base of an offensive blow against Constantinople, it was not a first-class defensive place, for the power that had command of the sea could always cut it off.

To England the war brought a loss of prestige in the capacity of her generals, the efficiency of her military system, and the ability of her administration to carry on war. To France, who had borne two-thirds of the burden and heat of the long siege, it brought results still more disastrous. Her enemy was not Russia. The march of the Sclav southwards or eastwards could have only a remote importance to her; but anything that weakened the power that lay at the other side of

Germany was a terrible blow to France. Napoleon the Third was supposed to have deeply at heart the reversal of the settlement of Europe, made in the Congress of Vienna. If so, he should have better read the aims and intrigues of the emperors and kings whose will became the law to Europe at that time. Lewis the Eighteenth was not much of a monarch, and Alexander was by no means a friend to France; but there was a significance in the words spoken by the Russian ruler to his French "brother" at the moment when Prussia claimed Alsace and Lorraine in 1814 as part of her plunder: "Stand fast, brother, stand fast, and I will see that these provinces are not taken from you."

The war against Russia, which France so lightly entered upon in 1854, put into the hands of Prussia fifteen years later the cheap price at which the neutrality of Russia could be assured in the dismemberment of France. To be allowed to tear up the Treaty of Paris of 1856 was inducement sufficient to Russia to let Paris stand alone in her agony in 1870-71.

The real gainers by the Crimean war were Sardinia and Prussia, the first by knowing when to interfere with her small army, the last by knowing how to abstain altogether with her big one.

It was in the battle of the Tchernaya, fought in August 1855, that the first foundations of the present kingdom of Italy were laid; and while the arms of France, England, and Russia were proving at Alma, Inkermann, Balaklava, and in the ten weary months of toil and bloodshed of the trenches, that the old arms and tactics of Frederick and Napoleon had become wholly obsolete, Moltke was quietly watching the costly experiment, and

had already begun to apply to the Prussian army the lessons of change and improvement which the errors and failures of the rival antagonists were teaching.

"The last of the old sieges," Gordon had called that of Sebastopol. Of the old battles, old arms, old cannon, he might have added, and sorrowfully also have said, "the last of the old army too." But the end of the siege was not to end the labours of the army; still less of its engineer officers. The conquest of Sebastopol was a barren one. "As for plunder," writes Gordon, "there is literally nothing but rubbish and fleas; the Russians have carried off everything else. They left their pictures in the churches, which form consequently the only spoil, and which *I do not care about buying.*" The italics are not Gordon's, but the sentence shows the respect for religion in any and every form, which later on is to be the ruling principle in his life.

Three weeks after the fall of Sebastopol an expedition was sent against Kinburn, at the mouth of the Dnieper. Here, at the extremity of a long sandy spit, stood the fort of Kinburn or Kilburn, as it is variously spelt, guarding the entrance to the Liman, as the embouchure of the Rivers Bug and Dnieper is called. The original idea of fortifying this point belongs to an Englishman. It was Paul Jones, the famous sea-rover, privateer, pirate, or hero, as he is variously named by his enemies and friends, who first suggested to Suwarow that the spit of land should have a fort constructed upon its extremity. The attack of the fort by the Fleet was the butterfly and the Nasmyth hammer. More than eight hundred guns thundered against eighty during four hours; then the place surrendered. It was exactly

a year since the first bombardment of Sebastopol by land and sea had taken place.

The second winter came, and the work of destroying the docks at the south side went on. Gordon's letters were no more headed "Camp before Sebastopol." He is now at work in mining the docks and blowing up the forts, wharves, locks, and granite buildings of the Arsenal.

Both armies appear to be weary of the struggle; the Russians in huts over on the north side, the allies comfortably hutted and well-fed on the old plateau between Mount Sapoune and Balaklava.

Meanwhile negotiations for peace are going on. Although the war has been little more than one long siege, the drain upon all the powers engaged has been enormous. Three armies have perished: France has spent over eighty millions sterling; England more than half that sum. Russia, obliged to carry on war in a remote corner of her vast empire, without railroads, marching troops enormous distances over the winter roads, has suffered a loss of life and money impossible to estimate. As for honour and glory, all sides had about equal shares, but the failure to carry the Redan rankled deep in the mind of the British army, and when Gordon writes in March 1856, "We do not, generally speaking, like the thought of peace until after another campaign," he was uttering the general opinion of the service. "I expect to remain abroad for three or four years," he adds, "which individually I would sooner spend in war than in peace. There is something indescribably exciting in the former." Then came truce, armistice, and finally peace.

The Russians, now friendly, come up on the plateau: we wander inland over the Tchernaya to Baidar and the

Katcha. Gordon rides to the Alma, has a look at the battle-field, and returns to Sebastopol the same day,—"A fifty-mile ride there and back over a grass country completely deserted." Another day he visits the north side of Sebastopol, thinks it "strong, but the north or star fort is a tumble-down affair, and not at all formidable," and is certain that we should have attacked on that side, and not upon the south. In May he takes advantage of the interval between peace and embarkation to run up along the south coast—the garden of the Crimea —where there are no signs of strife, and the summer palaces of the Russian Court and nobility stand untouched, showing how completely the great siege had centred and localised the ravages of war.

On May 18th Gordon finally quitted the Crimea, and proceeded at once to join the frontier delimitation survey in Bessarabia, where, during the succeeding eleven months, he was engaged in the work of travelling along and fixing the new frontier between Russia and the Danubian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, two names which were shortly after to disappear from the political map of Europe, and to become merged into Roumania.

The corner of Europe which lies between the Carpathian Mountains and the Black Sea presented in the level sameness of its surface a singular mixture and diversity of race and religion, and in a sweep of vision around a single standpoint all the varying characteristics of the three empires which there come together could be seen and studied. Turk, Austrian, and Russian then met on the line of the Pruth. At the close of the war in the Crimea it almost looked as if the slow movement

of Russia southwards had at last been effectually stayed, and that the Danube would in future be a barrier between Moslem and Muscovite; but even in the letters written by Gordon during his year's work along the Pruth the reader can gather a good deal of the true causes which underlie the surface of what seems only the aggression of a great and powerful despotism: *the peasant is with the Russian.* "The Jews swarm in the towns. The doctors, priests, shopkeepers, and mechanics are Germans, Greeks, Armenians, and Jews," but "Russian and Moldavian are the only languages spoken by the peasants." "The newly ceded territory is in great disorder. The inhabitants refuse to obey the Moldaves and own nobody's authority. This is caused, I suspect, by Russian intrigues." Already there were cracks in the foundation of the new settlement.

In April 1857 Gordon sees Lord Stratford de Redcliffe at Constantinople. The great "Elthchi" questions the young engineer about the new frontier. "He wished that we had held out for the whole of Bessarabia when it would have been worth having." So, no doubt, it would, but Napoleon the Third had begun to see the mistake he had made in fighting Russia, and already he was anxious to conciliate her. It was too late. The Treaty of Paris of 1856 must be blotted out thirteen years later in the ashes of the Second Empire.

From Constantinople Gordon goes in early May to Trebizonde, visiting Sinope by the way, where the wrecks of the Turkish ships sunk by the Russians in 1853 are still to be seen. From Trebizonde he proceeds to Erzerum, and begins at once the work of the commission, which is to verify the new frontier line between

Russia and Turkey in Asia. Here, for the first time, he is face to face with a state of society almost savage; the roads are mere tracks practicable for horses only, and at walking pace. "No such thing as a wheeled carriage is to be seen." "The inhabitants are very poor and in their primitive condition. They sleep in houses which serve as stables and dwelling-places at the same time." His Turish *confrère* in the work of demarcation has been unable to procure any money from his Government to defray the expenses of the journey, and in lieu of money he has been told to take any horses or mules he could lay his hands on. This direction he obeys by stopping the caravans on their way from Persia to Constantinople, throwing off the goods, putting his own traps upon the empty pack-saddles, and carrying off the animals.

During the next six months Gordon was engaged on the frontier work. In June he visits the wonderful ruins of Ani, once the old capital of Armenia, now a marvellous scene of ruin, standing upon the mountain side with its lava-built palace and immense number of churches roofless and silent, in a vast solitude. Next month he is camping with the Kurds, climbs and all but reaches the summit of Ararat, that great solitary mass of lava and snow which from a height of nigh seventeen thousand feet looks down upon Armenia, Georgia, and Erivan. In August he visits Lazistan, the people of which State "supply the Constantinople Turks with slaves whom they kidnap from the Gourelians who are on the Russian side." In the preceding "eighteen months sixty-two people have been kidnapped, sixteen killed, and twenty or thirty wounded on the part of the Gourelians."[1]

[1] *Letters from Armenia*: London, 1884.

Twenty years later Gordon was destined to visit the other extreme of the Turkish slave trade, and to see in the sands of the Soudan and the swamps of the Equatorial Nile the same infamous traffic which Russia was here slowly stamping out in the mountains of Circassia and Kurdistan.

Gordon returned to England in November 1857, after an absence from home of nearly three years. That long interval had been spent in incessant labour. War, travel, and the practical study of his profession had filled the entire time. Seldom had such varied experience fallen to the lot of one so young. On all the shores of the Black Sea he had seen and lived with the oldest and the newest among the nations of men, and had looked at their lives laid bare by the hard hand of war. The chance had not been thrown away. He left England a boy, he came back to it a man. Years later it was to be said of him that he had read only one book —the Bible—but the world holds many books besides those that are on the shelves of its libraries, and in the unwritten volumes of its greatest works, in the university of its universe, Gordon during these three years had not many equals of his age.

The winter of 1857-58 was spent at home. It was the time of the great Sepoy Mutiny: the horrors of Cawnpore had suddenly revealed to the nation the fact that beneath the veneer of the civilisation which we had introduced into India lay a ferocity as cruel as ever existed in the worst days of Moghul or Mahratta power. But history, writing a hundred years hence, will probably concern itself not so much with the cruelties of Asiatics, debauched and degraded by centuries of ignor-

ance and depravity, as with the spectacle of deliberate vengeance practised by the victors, which was alike unworthy of a great or a civilised nation.

After spending the winter with his people in England Gordon started in the spring of 1858 again for Armenia, travelling by way of Constantinople. The steamer from Odessa called at Sebastopol and made a stay there of twenty-four hours. Gordon visits the city, the forts, the graveyards, and the site of the old camp. "The grass has so overgrown the place where the camp stood," he says, "that it was with difficulty I found my hut. The graveyards are well cared for, but covered with grass. The Russian works and our trenches have subsided into insignificant heaps, and give no idea of their original size. I thought we had dug up every root, but at present small oak bushes about fifteen inches high are springing up everywhere, and in five years more the ground will be scarcely known again."

The wiseacre who said Gordon had only read one book had surely forgotten this day amongst the ruins of Sebastopol in May 1858; there were a good many volumes lying open in these grass-grown hillocks, and some philosophy to be learned in the oak-groves which sun and shower were already raising out of the bones and cinders of the great siege.

The summer of 1858 was passed in the mountains south of the main range of the Caucasus, again tracing the boundary line between Turkey and Russia, through forests where the track has to be cut as they proceed, and over mountains where "life is more the work of an animal than anything else." There is a good deal of friction between his Russian and Turkish fellow-labourers,

and "my work consists chiefly in arranging the affairs of my two colleagues, such as finding the pyramids we placed last year, and which the inhabitants have carefully destroyed, finding out the line to be cut in the woods, and in generally keeping the two others from squabbling." This is on August 17th. Writing three weeks later he says: "I am pretty tired of my post of peacemaker, for which I am naturally not well adapted." He is evidently tired of the frontier work, for in the same letter he writes: "I am quite in the dark as to how my mission has been fulfilled, but it is really immaterial to me, for I will not accept other work of such an anomalous character." In November 1858 he turns back to the Black Sea, and travelling by Kars, Ardahan, and Artvin, through "scenery the finest I ever saw," reaches Constantinople on the 16th, and is in England at the end of the month.

The four years which, with one short interval, Gordon had spent abroad, were years full of consequence to the world. Everywhere in Europe a new spirit had appeared—a spirit which, acting by the interior strength of peoples, was destined to undo much of the old system of check and counter-check, poise and balance, which Metternich and Castlereagh had imposed upon an exhausted Continent. Not without great wars and struggles were these changes to be consummated. Meanwhile that long-standing chronic disease of the European body politic, the Eastern Question, which, stripped of temporary issues and passing aspects, is only the old struggle of Cross against Crescent, of Europe against Asia, had been laid in temporary rest on the plateau of Sebastopol. The stipulations drawn up and boundaries laid down with

so much care were destined, like the stone pyramids and wooden marks which the inhabitants of Armenia and Lazistan had so quickly levelled, to disappear before a march which, whatever may be its final destiny, so far eats deep, as it moves, into the features of the land and the minds of men.

When Gordon came back to England after the four years so filled with war, travel, and exploration, his mind was fixed in the lines it was henceforward to move in. He had drunk, and drunk deeply, at that spring which, when it is once tasted, can never be forgotten; he had learned to read the great book which the earth opens to those of her children who care to seek its knowledge. Henceforth he is to be at home in the solitude, his mind is to have the power of peopling with thought the forest depth or the gray desert wilderness, and only in cities and in crowds is the loneliness of life to be possible to him.

CHAPTER III

CHINA

THE country which was now to become the scene of the labours of Charles Gordon, and in which the great qualities of his mind were soon to force him into the foremost rank among the men of action of his time, was of all lands the one least likely to offer scope for the successful display of a stranger's genius. Satisfied with a civilisation peculiar to itself, looking back to a remote history which, in comparison, made modern the life of every contemporary nation in the world, possessing the moral strength that lies in the best qualities of conservatism,—love and veneration for departed worth,—and having the physical life of its entire executive administration endowed with the vigour derived from a system which made education the sole test of place and power, China might well have seemed a land as sealed against the efforts of outside individual energy as its commerce had long been closed to the mercantile activity of the world. Nor were there any great moral truths previously unknown, or new mechanical discoveries on the incoming flow of which a stranger might hope to attain prominence in China. The people that had used gunpowder a thousand years before it was known to Europe, that had

guided ships with the aid of the mariner's compass since the second century, that had been aware of the circulation of the blood and had inoculated for the small-pox long centuries before the days of Harvey and of Jenner, and with whom the most beautiful productions of the silk-loom and the ceramic art go back into an unrecorded antiquity, were not likely to bow down before the advent of a stranger who in his own land was then unknown, and who came as an unnoticed soldier in a hostile army which had just taken the capital city of the Empire. But before we begin this period of Gordon's life, the most remarkable save one in his whole career, it will be advisable to speak a few words upon the nature of the service which brought him to China.

In the long series of English wars with China which began in 1839-40, opium was from first to last the cause of quarrel. However skilfully minor incidents may have been seized upon to hide the true reason of conflict, impartial history has now stamped its verdict upon this discreditable page of our history. The real matter in dispute between the two nations had all the simplicity that lies in the distinction between black and white, between abstract right and abstract wrong. In forcing our opium upon China we were reversing the alternative of money or life given by the highwayman to his victim. We were demanding life and money at the same moment. Opium to the Chinaman was death and worse than death, and in endeavouring to keep this terrible new poison, for it was entirely a novelty, from their shores, the Government of China were only fulfilling the first obligation of rulers—the protection of the lives of their people. There is nothing

clearer in history than the sincerity of the Chinese Government in their action regarding opium. At any moment it was possible for them to create out of the trade in the drug the most lucrative sources of Chinese revenue; or, had their object been merely the injury of the foreign grower and carrier, they had only to grow at home the plant which yielded the poison; but they would neither tax nor produce. "It is a principle of the Chinese Government," wrote our own agent, "not to license what they condemn as immoral. I know they glory as to the superiority in principle of their own Government, and scorn those Governments that tolerate such vices, and convert them into a source of pecuniary advantage or public revenue." Never, perhaps, in the history of nations has a Government received from its enemies such a tribute to the integrity of its motives and the justice of its actions. But justice counts for little where human interests are deeply concerned, and as the production of opium was a Government monopoly in India that yielded many million pounds to the revenue, the trade with China was to be enforced at the cannon's mouth. It was little wonder that, in the face of such experience in diplomatic intercourse with a foreign State, a Chinese Minister should say, "Reason has no place in the judgments of those people. It is not rule but misrule that guides them."

The war which broke out in 1860, although indirectly the result of the more than strained relations produced by long-continued struggles, arising from the forced introduction of opium, did not directly spring from that fertile source of quarrel. The prestige of our arms had received a severe blow in the repulse of the

squadron at the Taku Forts in the Tientsin River, and for once we were entering into quarrel with China with clean hands. The war did not last long: the Chinese had placed all their hopes of defence in the forts at Taku, guarding the Tientsin River, the approach to the capital. These forts were captured without difficulty in August, and Pekin was shortly afterwards occupied by the Allied Forces. Eight miles to the north-west stood the park, gardens, and palace of the Yuen-Ming-Yuen, the Summer Palace, the Versailles of the Emperor of China. Here, amid an expanse covering twelve square miles of ground, all the ingenious diversities and embellishments of Chinese architectural and horticultural art had been exhausted to produce a terrestrial paradise; lakes, rivulets, cascades, pagodas, rocks, open spaces, and woodlands formed the varied setting to the numerous palaces of marble, porcelain, and cedar wood which in turn surrounded the central residence of the Emperor. This beautiful monument of Eastern art, "the garden of perpetual brightness," was devastated and burnt by order of the English Envoy in retaliation for the imprisonment and murder of certain British and French prisoners. It is difficult to believe that the perpetration of such an act of vandalism could be possible in these later days of the world by men who were supposed to represent the most advanced civilisation. In all ages of war burning has been the peculiar stamp of barbarism. It is at once the easiest act of rapine, and the one which history remembers longest against the spoiler. If the Chinese, in the ignorance of their pride, had imagined the outside world to be barbarians, the senseless destruction of the

Yuen-Ming-Yuen could hereafter be pointed to as a tangible proof of the truth of that belief. That this act of vandalism was repugnant to Gordon we cannot doubt. "You can scarcely imagine the beauty and magnificence of the palaces we burnt," he writes. "It made one's heart sore to destroy them. It was wretchedly demoralising work."

During these events Charles Gordon had filled the subordinate part of a captain of engineers attached to a large expeditionary force. He had arrived in China after the Taku Forts had fallen, and, when the capture of Pekin put an end to hostilities, his work became the usual routine description of sapper life, the hutting of troops in the new camp at Tientsin, the preparation for a winter which was colder than that of the old plateau of the Chersonese.

In this camp at Tientsin, amid a vast level salt plain, fertile but inexpressibly dreary, a year and a half passed away, broken only by an occasional visit to Pekin, and one expedition to the Great Wall at Suen-hoo, two hundred miles north-west of the capital. It was mid-winter when he reached this great landmark of old Tartar times, stretching in an unbroken line over mountain and plain, carried over rivers and across hilltops until its crenellated battlements and square towers are lost in remote horizons; fifteen hundred miles long, two thousand years old, built to stop the Tartar, but now having the Tartar reigning behind it. A book with a good deal of teaching in it, even where the sand has drifted against it, and time has crumbled its towers into the level of the plains.

While Gordon was travelling along this old northern

defence of China against the Tartar, an enemy more desolating than the hosts of Genghis Khan was working havoc in the most fertile provinces of the Middle Empire seven hundred miles south of Pekin. Profiting by the withdrawal of the Imperial forces to resist the advance of the Allied Armies towards the capital, the Taiping rebels moving from the southern provinces of China had overrun the wide delta of the Yang-tse-Kiang, the centre of the richest industries and the garden of the Empire. City after city had fallen before them. Nankin, the ancient capital of the southern Empire; Soo-chow, the fresh-water Venice of the East; Hang-chow, the gate of the great imperial canal, had all been carried, and, with a foreign army in possession of Pekin, and the fairest provinces desolated by a successful rebellion, it might well have seemed that the last hour of the Empire had struck, and that the oldest civilisation in the world was tottering to its final fall. But the rivets that hold together the marvellous fabric of Chinese dominion were made of stronger material than even such disasters could disrupt. It is the storm that proves the ship. The confidence which every individual of the three hundred million souls in China feels in the absolute right, truth, power of their system of government was not mistaken or misplaced, and no sooner had peace been made with the northern invaders than the Imperial forces turned their attention to the middle provinces, where, like a fire long left uncontrolled, the Taiping rebellion was now sweeping everything before it.

The two years during which this revolt had been allowed to gather head had made a vast difference in its power. The possession of the delta of the Yang-tse-

Kiang had given the Taipings access to the foreign trade, and thus put them in possession of whatever money could purchase of guns, small arms, and munitions of war. A mercantile community long accustomed to regard the smuggling of opium as a reputable and legitimate branch of commerce was not likely to be hindered by qualms of conscience from selling arms and ammunition to any one who would pay for them. For one hundred miles north-west and south-west of Shanghai a vast network of creeks, canals, rivers, and water-courses intersected the entire surface of the country, offering unequalled opportunities for smuggling, but the occupation of Ningpo and many other seaports had given the Taipings access to the ocean, and enabled them to treat direct with the foreign traders. What this trade was may be judged from the seizure of a single English ship, which was found to contain three hundred pieces of ordnance, several thousand rifles and revolvers, and fifty tons of ammunition. Thus sedulously fed by foreign merchants, the Taiping rebellion continued to roll on with ever-increasing volume, constantly demanding fresh plunder to supply it with the sinews of war, and drawing to its ranks a daily deepening stream of the piratical and robber element, which a demoralising illicit trade of half a century's duration had called into life along the coasts of China.

Fortunately for the cause of right and truth in the Empire, the conflagration thus fed and fostered was destined before long to threaten the very existence of the foreign trading communities of Shanghai, and to force into joint action of repression the Imperial authorities and the foreign residents.

In 1860, while the Allied Forces were advancing

against Pekin, the smoke and flames of burning villages within sight of Shanghai warned the inhabitants of that city of the near approach of the Taiping hordes. There were no troops to resist the threatened attack. In the presence of a common calamity the Imperial mandarins and the foreign residents joined hands to resist the new invader, and a force was hastily got together, raised by an American living in Shanghai, officered from the floating population of foreigners, recruited among the militia and peasants of the neighbourhood, and paid for by the Imperial Government. The man to whom the initiation, organisation, discipline, and earlier successes of this force is due was an American named Ward, a civilian whose name has been too much lost sight of in the subsequent renown of a more celebrated man, but who was unquestionably a natural leader of men, a brave and skilful soldier, possessing all the qualities which, had not death cut short his career, might easily have attained to a reputation not inferior to that of Clive. Ward fell while leading on his men to the assault of a city fifteen miles from Ningpo in September 1862. In the two years of his short military life he had fought some seventy engagements without once suffering defeat. The force had gradually increased from a company of one hundred men to a body numbering two thousand, with two batteries of artillery; and so well had its efforts succeeded in re-establishing confidence in the Government at Pekin, that an Imperial edict announced, in the grandiloquent language so dear to the Chinese official mind, that henceforth the little disciplined force of Shanghai was to bear the high-sounding title of the "Chang-sheng-Chume," or the "Ever-victorious Army."

For six months before the death of Ward the efforts of his army and of the larger armies of the Imperial generals around Shanghai had been assisted by strong naval and military detachments from both the English and French forces, which had moved from Tientsin to Shanghai. Thus a pressure had been brought to bear upon the Taiping enemy which soon cleared him for a radius of thirty or forty miles from the country around Shanghai. This result had not been achieved without loss to the Allies. Admiral Protet, commanding the French squadron, was killed in the assault of Nan-jae, twenty miles south of Shanghai; other English and French officers had fallen, but as a rule the rapid bombardment of a city wall at close range had been followed by a rush up the breach, a fight, and a stampede of rebels through lanes and enclosures, creeks and canals, where forces skilfully placed to cut off fugitives had worked havoc among them. In all these operations Gordon had taken a prominent part as the senior engineer officer with the English contingent, sometimes pushing on to reconnoitre a city wall to the very edge of the moat which ran in front of it, often placing guns in an advanced position, laying boats to bridge some creek for the storming parties to reach the foot of the breach, and always sketching and surveying the tangled web of canal and watercourse, which at first sight seemed to render the theatre of operations a most difficult field of warfare, but which, when once fully understood by a leader possessing the true genius of attack, gave rare opportunities for the display of boldness, nice calculation, and strategical skill. When the Taiping rebels had been driven from the thirty-five mile radius around Shanghai, the English and

French contingents ceased to co-operate with the Chinese forces, and Gordon no longer took an active part in the hostilities which still went on between the rebels and the Imperialists; but he continued the work of surveying the rivers, creeks, and cities of that portion of the provinces of Kiang-soo and Chi-kiang which lay within the limits of the conquered region.

Meanwhile many changes had taken place in the Ever-victorious Army. Ward had been succeeded by another American, named Burgevine, a man by no means wanting in courage, but wholly unfitted by character and temper for command. Burgevine, having grievously insulted a mandarin, was dismissed from the army, and the command passed to Holland, an English officer of the marine service. Despite a thorough reorganisation of the force, it was soon destined to suffer its first defeat. On February 22d, 1863, the city of Tait-san was attacked in the usual manner of bombardment at close range and assault, but care was not taken to ensure exact knowledge of the ground leading to the breach, and the presence of a broad and deep wet ditch in the immediate front of the city wall was unknown. Checked by this obstacle, the columns of assault were thrown into confusion and beaten back with heavy loss. Sixteen English and other European officers, and four hundred and fifty of the men were killed and wounded in this disastrous affair. This defeat was shortly followed by another repulse at the breach of the fortified city of Shaon-shing, where the French officer in command was killed, with many others of the force. These mishaps soon produced the inevitable consequences of disaster among troops whose discipline is imperfect; a spirit of dissension and mutiny

appeared. It was felt on all sides that a leader of men was required to keep the army together, and the officer commanding the English troops at Shanghai, with whom the selection practically rested, named Major Gordon for command. Thus on March 24th, 1863, Gordon stepped out for the first time from that inevitable environment of the mass which so often keeps entangled in its folds men on whom Nature has conferred great gifts. Fate, it is said, knocks once at every man's door, but sometimes it is when the shadows are gathering and the fire is beginning to burn slow. Not so this time. Gordon had just passed his thirtieth year when Fortune not only knocked at, but threw open, the door which was to lead him to fame.

The origin of the Taiping rebellion, which thus far had run its desolating course through the southern provinces of China, lies still in oblivion. China, with all its long history of settled government, has been subject to fierce storms of rebellion, which have generally been produced by the teaching of some enthusiast intent upon the new and strange in philosophy rather than the effort of any class or political party in the State to alter social inequality or change a dynasty. Thus the rebellions of the sects of the White Lily and of Celestial Reason, both religious movements, spread ruin through many provinces a few generations since, and were in some respects the precursors of the Taiping movement of our time.[1]

[1] This movement, beginning in the inland provinces of Central China, had assumed in its earlier stages a character of mock Christianity; but, as time went on, plunder, outrage, and destruction of property became its sole objects; and when, in 1860, the conflict between the Imperial and foreign powers began, the true nature of the Taiping revolt had already been made apparent in countless acts of atrocity.

There are few mental tasks more difficult to the ordinary reader than that of following through pages of description the geographical position or physical conformation of some theatre of war: the reader who has constantly to keep in his mind points of compass, lines of advance, and the relative positions of contending forces is apt to read himself into a vague state of perplexity neither conducive to exactness of comprehension nor to his individual interest in the study. If, therefore, we take some well-known portion of England which in size and shape, if not in physical feature, is somewhat similar to the scene now to be the theatre of Gordon's exploits, it may be easier to understand the general nature of the campaign against the Taipings.

If we take for this purpose the counties of Kent, Surrey, and Sussex, and give to them a low alluvial surface, with the Yang-tse-Kiang as their northern boundary instead of the Thames, and everywhere intersect this region by streams, canals, and creeks, allowing the fullest water communication between the river on the north and the south coast, joining towns such as Woolwich, Chatham, Canterbury, Brighton, Tunbridge, and Dover in one great series of inland navigation, we shall form a pretty accurate conception of the shape, if not of the extent, of the scene of operations now to be described. To the north the region has the estuary of the Yang-tse-Kiang, on the east the ocean, on the south (corresponding to the Channel) the Bay of Hang-chow, while on the west (along the Hampshire side of Sussex and Surrey) there extended a string of many-sized lakes, which, together with the broad waterway of the Grand Canal, running on the east of these lakes, almost separ-

ated this portion of the delta from the rest of the province of Chi-kiang. As for the face of the country itself, it was for the most part a perfectly flat surface of very rich alluvial soil—here and there at intervals abrupt, rocky hills rose above this level sea of verdure and water: these ridges, in a far distant age of the world, had probably stood as islands in the estuary of the great river whose waters, carrying the silt and sand of immense interior regions, had gradually filled up with earth the intervening spaces. Thickly scattered through this level triangular peninsula stood many cities, most of them of old time, surrounded by walls of blue brick-work, ten to twenty feet high, crenellated, having towers built at intervals, arched gateways opening to the four cardinal points, and wide deep ditches or canals encircling the walls and ramifying in many branches through the streets. The walls, unlike those in the cities of the Middle Ages in Europe, stood a long way from the buildings, the town within the walls frequently not occupying a fifth of the enclosed space. If one was disposed to wonder how so many towns could find support in such a limited area of country, the exceeding fertility of the soil and the value of its productions supplied the answer. This delta of the Yang-tse-Kiang was the garden of China; in these low-lying fields the trees that nourished the gold-weaving silk-worms grew in the greatest luxuriance: every vegetable production of the tropical and temperate zones flourished there, and while the numerous canals and lakes teemed with fish they offered at once an unfailing means of irrigation and the easiest intercourse for trade.

At the time of Gordon's appointment to command

the Ever-victorious Army the positions occupied by the Taiping rebels and the Allied and Imperial forces were as follows: the Imperialists held Shanghai; the headquarters of Gordon's force occupied a strong position at Soong-kiong, thirty miles inland from Shanghai; from this point canals branched in all directions; fifty miles again on the other side of Soong-kiong the rebels had their headquarters at Soo-chow, a large city of the first rank, situated on the Grand Canal, and almost reaching to the shore of Lake Taihoo. From this central position they controlled the whole system of canals and lakes between the main stream of the Yang-tse-Kiang and the Bay of Hang-chow. The Imperial forces were in possession of the Yang-tse-Kiang River, and had been fruitlessly besieging Nankin, one hundred miles north-west of Soo-chow, for many years. The country outside the delta of the Yang-tse-Kiang was generally in the hands of the Imperialists—indeed the Taiping rebellion was so destructive to life and property that it almost burned itself out after a certain period of destruction, so great was the havoc worked by it; but in the delta the exceeding richness of the provinces and the foreign assistance already mentioned had there enabled the rebellion to exist, and to concentrate itself in more permanent form.

Adopting again the parallel of England to the positions held by the rival forces, it would stand thus: the Imperialists occupy Dover, Folkestone, Canterbury, and Margate, with all the intervening country between these places. Gordon's headquarters are at Canterbury: the Taipings hold the remainder of Kent, with their headquarters at Chatham. Hampshire is a network of large and small lakes, the country beyond is mixed Taiping

and Imperialist; and London, pushed back to somewhere beyond Reading, represents the position of Nankin, now besieged for fourteen years by the Imperialists. Such was the situation of affairs when Gordon assumed command of the disciplined Chinese force, the task before him to reduce the delta and its score of walled cities to Imperial authority.

He will do it in eighteen months, he tells the Chinese Generalissimo, the Footai Li Hung Chang, since a well-known figure in Chinese history, and he will do it by the very means which this labyrinth of canal, lake, and river puts into his hand; for with all its intricacies it is only a big chess-board, its vast mazework making it all the better for the man who first learns it by heart; and these creeks and cross creeks will be so many parallels and trenches for sapping up to the very heart of the revolt, for turning cities, taking positions in reverse, and above all, for using the power which steam gives to transport men, stores, and munitions along these navigable waterways. It is now the month of March 1863; by August 1864 the last city will have been taken from the Taipings, and the delta cleared.

In the end of March Gordon moves from his camp at Soong-kiong to Foo-shan, fifty miles north. He is here joined by an Imperialist force, the object being the relief of the city of Chanzu, lying ten miles to the south-west. Chanzu is besieged by the Taipings, whose investing force reaches as far as Foo-shan. The stockades at Foo-shan are soon carried by the Ever-victorious Army, and the united force moves on to Chanzu, the Taipings retreating from that city, which is entered on April 5th.

The relieving expedition being thus easily effected, Gordon brings back his army to the old position at Soong-kiong, and prepares to begin the real work of clearing the delta. He has seen the country outside the thirty-five mile radius, has marked the line by which the Taiping centre at Soo-chow can best be reached; he will complete his preparations at the old headquarters and then take the field, he hopes, for a regular campaign, which will be prosecuted as a continuous consecutive effort, and not in a series of detached expeditions which have heretofore started from Soong-kiong to return to it when the particular enterprise was accomplished.

On April 29th he is in motion, the objective being the city of Tait-san, some thirty miles north of his permanent camp. It is a city of oblong form, surrounded by strong walls and wet ditches; but it also possesses a peculiar strength in the fact that it is the scene of the defeat of the Ever-victorious Army three months earlier. On the last day of April Gordon arrives before Tait-san. He has a force of three thousand of all arms, and the Imperialists, as usual, are half-besieging the rebel city and being half-besieged in their own position by the rebels. The former attack by Holland had been directed against the south face. Gordon moves round more to the west side, carries two stockades, and gets possession of the canal leading into the town, then he plants his guns opposite the west wall, six hundred yards distant from it, and opens fire on May 1st. The guns are 12-pounder howitzers and two 32-pounders; thanks to the facilities of water-carriage, the supply of ammunition is abundant. It is yet early in the afternoon when the breach is made; the guns have been pulled

on from cover to cover until at last they are within one hundred yards of the wall. Movable mantlets of wood and iron protect the gunners from the enemy's fire: the rebels, seeing that the moment of the assault has come, concentrate their men behind and around the threatened spot. At every discharge from the 32-pounders larger masses of the brick wall and its enclosed centre of rubble masonry tumble out and fall down into the fosse, until a wide sloping mass of brick and rubbish leads up to the summit of the breach. Then the word to storm is given: the boats in the canal have already moved up, and turning to the right, have formed a bridge across the ditch. Over the decks the stormers rush to the assault, but as they cross the boats they are met with a terrible fire from the battlements. They rush on to the foot of the breach and begin to ascend the broken masonry. The moment has now come when the guns of the besiegers must stop firing, for friend and enemy are together. 'Bravely led on by the leader of the forlorn hope, Captain Bannon, the assaulting column gains half-way up the ascent, meets in a desperate hand-to-hand struggle with the rebels, loses its gallant leader, and is finally hurled down to the foot of the breach, where, mangled and broken, its survivors get back as best they can across the bridge of boats. But a repulse is only a defeat when it is final: again the guns open on the breach, while another column is forming for the assault. It is now seen that the Taipings are led on by Europeans, and the arms on both sides are of English make. Once more the assault is made, the column rushes up the now slippery breach, and is met as before by the defenders. It gains the top

of the ascent, but the fight is stubborn, and once or twice there is a backward surge down the slope, then one final upward effort, and the place is won. One officer is killed, three are wounded, and there are two hundred and fifty casualties among the men—a heavy loss out of so small a force. But the capture of Tait-san has re-established the reputation of the Ever-victorious Army, and its leader is now recognised as a man who knows the three great secrets of war—when to strike, where to strike, and how to strike. Twenty-one years later the scene at this breach of Tait-san comes back to Gordon. He is writing late in November 1884, when the Arabs have begun to fire from Goba at the Palace in Khartoum, and some of his old Soudan soldiers are manning the battery against him. "It will not be the first time I have been fired at by my own soldiers," he says, "for in China two men of the Thirty-first Regiment were on the breach at Tait-san: one was killed, the other, struck by a shell splinter, was taken prisoner. 'Mr. Gordon, Mr. Gordon, you will not let me be killed!' 'Take him down to the river and shoot him!'—and aside—'put him in my boat, let the doctor attend him, and send him down to Shanghai.' His name was Hargreaves, and I daresay he exists at present."[1]

Gordon prepared at once to follow up this hard-won but important victory by moving to the attack of other rebel cities. Heretofore the practice had been to fall back after an action upon the stationary camp at Soong-kiong, rest and refit, and then sally forth upon a new enterprise. This mode of warfare, peculiar to all semi-disciplined armies, has many personal attractions for the

[1] *Khartoum Journals:* London, 1885.

soldier. It enables him to dispose of the plunder he has taken in the recent battle: he tastes the pleasures of heroship while the laurels of conquest are still green, and the strain of service is of such short duration that he is soon ready to set out again; but it is, of course, fatal to proper discipline or to anything like a speedy termination of war, and it has frequently in history enabled the beaten side not only to recover the losses of defeat, but to convert defeat into subsequent victory.

Gordon now attempted to lead his troops direct to the attack of the important city of Quin-san, ten miles west and south of Tait-san, but the "Go and he goeth, come and he cometh" of real discipline was all unknown among officers or men of the Ever-victorious Army, and their leader soon found that, instead of leading his army forward to Quin-san, he must follow it back to Soong-kiong. So back they all go to camp, and for another month the old work goes on, amid chafing of spirit and clash of words between the leader, who is all fire, forecast, and energy, and the followers, who, brave as lions when the actual tug of battle comes, are still what the average fighting man has been and will be to the end of the chapter of war. At last all the plunder has been disposed of; the heroes are tired of strutting, and ready to set out again. This time the objective is Quin-san, a city which is the key to an intricate system of lake and canal lying between it and the central Soo-chow of the Taipings. It is the end of May when the force reaches Quin-san, bringing with it all its military store, and the little armed and iron-sheeted steamer *Hyson*, under her brave Irish captain, Davidson. The Imperialist generals are entrenched and stockaded in front of the east gate

of the city, the rebels are strongly stockaded outside the walls, and are reinforced and supported from their head-quarters at Soo-chow, twenty miles more to the west, to which place leads a broad and deep canal, having a road-way running along its northern bank. The city of Quin-san itself stands upon the slope of a high hill, once an island in the old estuary; the hill is entirely encompassed by wall and moat, and its conical summit gives the besieged a vantage point from which to anticipate movements of attack. Altogether it is a formidable place looked at from the east, and before attacking on that side Gordon would see more of the south and west faces, and of the canal which connects Quin-san with the centre of the revolt at Soo-chow. So, taking the Chinese generals Ching and his superior, the Footai Li Hung Chang, on board the *Hyson* steamer (which now flies the long "snake-streamer" at its mast-head, the battle-flag of the leader), Gordon drops back a little out of view of the watchful eyes on the hill above the besieged town, and then turns sharp to the south into a branch canal that leads off in that direction. This canal they follow for nine miles, then turn away to westward, and steaming on for an hour, begin to bend up to the north. They have now come nigh twenty miles by this circuitous route, circling on a wide curve round the city, and they are at the back or on the west side of Quin-san, some twelve miles distant from it, and almost midway between it and Soo-chow. They have, in fact, struck the main line of the enemy's communication; there are only a few weak stockades to defend this vital point, and the canal upon which the steamer is moving has a line of stakes across it some little distance in advance of its

point of junction with the main Quin-san-Soo-chow waterway. The *Hyson*, having seen all this, steams back to the old position east of Quin-san, and the night is spent in preparation for the morrow's work. At dawn next day the move begins. A regiment of infantry, a battery of artillery, and an unnumbered body of Imperial troops in boats and junks, with the *Hyson* steaming in the centre, follow the same canal course as yesterday to the point where the two creeks come together. Then the obstructing stakes are pulled up from the mud of the canal, and the steamer and the boats move on to the main canal, where the Taipings, in vast confusion at this unexpected attack, separate into two retreating bodies to right and left. There is only the canal and the track along it for these confused masses to follow. The *Hyson* turns to the left in pursuit of the men retreating towards Soo-chow, the Imperial troops and the regiments of the disciplined force hold the point where the canals meet. Despite reinforcements from Soo-chow, and stockades and stone forts which have been built to defend the line to that place, the Taipings make no stand; broken into panic-stricken bodies, they crowd each other into the canal and lakes which bound the road on either side. The confusion is prodigious. Numbers are drowned, many surrender themselves prisoners, still greater numbers are shot down by the fire of shell and grape from the steamer's guns. The pursuit is continued along the canal to within half a mile of Soo-chow. It is now sunset, and a long return road, still occupied by broken bodies of rebels, has to be followed back to the point where the Imperial troops have been left. The *Hyson* throws a single shell from her 32-pounder into the rebel capital, and then

retraces her way to the junction of the canals. It is now ten o'clock at night, but a fierce fight is going on at this place, for the garrison of Quin-san, alarmed at the news brought in by fugitives, have sallied out to force their way under cover of night to Soo-chow. The steamer passes on towards Quin-san and engages these confused masses of men: all night long the firing goes on, until daylight shows the rebel bands dispersed and Quin-san in the hands of the Imperial troops.

This singular action, an armed steamer with a crew of some forty men all told against many thousand men, was perhaps the most strikingly representative feat of Gordon's peculiar genius for war—quick to catch, resolute to act, knowing the power of rapid movement against a demoralised foe, and realising the enormous effect which the unexpected can produce even with the slenderest means.

Quin-san, now in Imperial possession, was to be made the permanent headquarters of the force, but the men, despite a success which must have shown them a new power had come among them, refuse to obey, and there seems nothing for it but martial law. One mutineer is ordered to be shot, and the sentence is executed outside the west gate of Quin-san; but martial law is a dangerous experiment in a semi-civilised country, where to desert is practically to get away without chance of recapture. In the night following the execution two thousand of the Ever-victorious Army had disappeared to their homes. Fortune favours the brave: two days earlier this desertion *en masse* would have been a fatal blow to further progress, but now it was different. The prisoners taken in the rebel rout along the Soo-chow-Quin-san canal gave a material for new soldiers better even than the

old ones. Within two days of a desertion which reduced his fighting force to a third of its normal strength, Gordon had enrolled as his followers two thousand Taiping prisoners. "They are much better men," he writes shortly after, "than the old ones;" and indeed it was easy for them to be so. Plunder, regular pay, and unlimited praise had long since sapped the soldier stamina of the Ever-victorious ones. The Taipings had tasted the bitterness of defeat, and had become all the better soldiers in the experience.

For two months Gordon remained at Quin-san, drilling his new levies, organising and preparing for the great effort which was to strike at the central stronghold of Soo-chow; but the result of his daring march in the rear of the rebel position at Quin-san had shown him the advantages which followed an attack upon the communications of the Taiping hordes, and henceforth he determined to direct all his strategy on lines similar to those then first practised.

Soo-chow sat secure from direct attack amidst its environment of lake. Tai-hoo, or the great lake, lay directly west of it: to the north-east and south-east the beautiful expanses of water known as the Sha-hoo and Kin-ki-koo spread their clear waters to gravelly beaches, where the golden pheasant still flew wild amid the thickets: the Tai-hoo was so large that from its centre the eye of the traveller rested only upon a horizon of sky and water. The city itself was of the first order, and although its prosperity had much decayed it still retained the beauty which of old had made it a proverb throughout the Empire that if Paradise was in heaven there was Soo-chow on earth.

It was at this city of Soo-chow that the Emperor Kanghi, second of the Manchow dynasty, dismounted from his horse and walked on foot through the streets, in 1689, in order not to injure the magnificent silks and embroidered tapestries which the inhabitants had laid profusely on the ground along the line of his route. The circuit of its massive walls measured twelve miles: the form of the city was an oblong square, six large gates opened landward, as many more gave entrance towards the lakes: every street had its corresponding canal, navigable for large-sized craft, while the freshness of the great body of water that lay adjacent to the place, the richness of the land between the lakes, the passage through the city of the Grand Canal, and the presence of a population skilled by the continuous training of countless generations of the best embroiderers and workers in silk in the world, made Soo-chow in the old days a rich emporium of trade and a luxurious centre of pleasure.

To attempt the capture of this city by assault while its communications remained open on every side would be clearly an operation of great difficulty; on the other hand, vast as was the circuit of the walls, the presence of so many lakes all connected with each other by broad and navigable channels rendered the isolation of the place a comparatively easy undertaking. Hold a town on the north and south sides of Soo-chow, as Quin-san held the east side: patrol the lakes with steamers and war junks; and the pinch of famine would soon be felt, all the sooner among an army which, during four years, had wasted and impoverished the resources of the country.

On July 25th, 1863, the force again took the field,

bound for a city south of Soo-chow named Woo-kiang. This place, surrounded by stockades, was captured and garrisoned by the end of the month, and Gordon was preparing to carry out the rest of the plan of isolation when an event occurred which caused him to delay his movements. Burgevine, the former commandant of the Ever-victorious Army, chafing under his dismissal, had gone to Pekin and procured an Imperial order reinstating him in command. The order was disregarded by the local authorities at Shanghai, who rightly insisted upon retaining Gordon at the head of the force. A considerable section of officers, chiefly countrymen of Burgevine, supported his cause, and threw up their commissions. Burgevine then joined th Taipings, bringing with him a number of his supporters. At first this desertion to the opposite side looked serious, but in reality it made little difference. Dissensions were rife in the garrison at Soo-chow, the Taipings were losing heart, the end of the rebellion was drawing near. Holding on to Woo-kiang, from which Burgevine vainly endeavoured to dislodge him, Gordon gradually drew in nearer to Soo-chow, captured by surprise the great bridge of Pata-chiao with its fifty-three arches, and finally in October completed the line of investment by joining his forces to those of the Imperial troops on the north of the city. By the end of October the foreign element in the Taiping ranks had abandoned the rebel cause, and a month later saw the defences and stockades lying outside the city wall on the east side in possession of the Imperial troops. The Taiping leaders still held positions of considerable strength at different points in the city, but with one exception the "Wangs," or chiefs, were already negotiating

either with Gordon or with the Imperial generals, Li Hung and Ching, for the surrender of the city on the best terms they could obtain. And now we arrive at a very painful episode in the history of the suppression of the Taiping rebellion—the surrender of Soo-chow and the treacherous execution of the Wangs after life and protection had been guaranteed them. Of course there are numerous conflicting accounts of this dark act, for whitewash will never be wanting to gold or power, but the excuses are unavailing to hide the bare facts that life had been promised to the chiefs on condition of surrender, and that life was taken when they surrendered. Gordon felt this dark deed very deeply. His word had been pledged to the Wangs for safety, and in negotiation with them he had laid stress upon the fact that his presence with the Imperial troops was a sure guarantee that the promise would be held sacred. Acting under the first impressions produced by the execution of the Wangs, Gordon resigned his command of the Ever-victorious Army, and the breach between him and the Imperialists was still further widened by his refusal to accept the money gift of ten thousand *taels* (between three and four thousand pounds) which the Emperor ordered to be paid him. On January 1st, 1864, Gordon was formally presented with the medal and the gratuity, accompanied by the Imperial decree conferring on him those marks of approbation. He wrote on the back of the translation of the Emperor's rescript his "regret that, owing to the circumstances which occurred since the capture of Soo-chow, he was unable to receive any mark of His Majesty the Emperor's recognition."

It is doubtful if in all its long history China possesses such another example of the treatment of high official documents. It was perhaps a pity that this resolution to withdraw from the command of the Ever-victorious Army was not persevered in by Gordon. For fame he had now done all that was to be done: the neck of the rebellion was broken, and the work of following up the capture of Soo-chow by the reduction of the country lying west of Lake Tai-hoo was only a matter of time. His insistence in resignation at this moment would have still broader marked the gulf of separation which lay between him and his employer. That he did not so persevere was undoubtedly due to the representations from his own consular and military authorities at Shanghai, and to the fear that, if he resigned the command of the Ever-victorious ones, that force might prove an element of danger to China and to the foreign residents at Shanghai by going over to the Taipings. Soldiers of fortune are a little apt to get confused as to the side upon which abstract right may rest in a quarrel; and it may even happen that, next to actual defeat of their own side, the total destruction of the enemy, which would put a period to their own employment, would appear to them the most deplorable calamity.

Yielding to other counsels and to second thoughts, Gordon consented to continue for a longer time in command of the semi-disciplined force, and in the end of February 1864 he again resumed active operations. We may pass quickly over the events which formed the incidents in this second phase of his service. During the months of March, April, and May Gordon continued to reduce towns in the district lying north-west of Lake

Tai-hoo, as before he had cleared the region to the east of the lake. The Taipings often fought with the courage of despair, and more than once their desperate resistance met with partial success. In the assault at Kintang Gordon received a wound, which did not, however, incapacitate him from active operations; indeed, far from inducing quiet, it seemed only to increase his energy. Hearing that the rebels had broken back into the region already cleared, he puts himself at the head of a portion of his force and moves rapidly against them. He reaches Waisso on March 31st, having covered one hundred and fifty miles in two days, is attacked by a large body of Taipings, and meets with a serious reverse, but that quiet and immovable determination which, twenty years later, is to make his name so famous in the hour of defeat is here apparent. He gets more men from his reserves, again assumes the offensive, and eleven days after his defeat routs the rebels with great loss and captures Waisso. One more victory, and his career as leader of the Ever-victorious Army is to end. The country is in a frightful state, the rebels are murdering wholesale, the villagers are suffering the last pangs of hunger, and are reduced to eat the dead bodies. "They are like wolves; the dead lie where they fall, and are in some cases trodden quite flat by the passers-by." On April 27th Gordon twice assaults the breach of Chang-chu-fu, and is twice driven back; then he begins to make regular approaches against the south gate, and a fortnight later the place is carried by a combined storming of the Imperialists and disciplined troops. Thus, after fourteen months, twelve of which had been spent in constant fighting, the work of the disciplined force is over.

Nankin and a few other cities remain still to be captured, but the Imperialists will finish the campaign themselves.

In June 1864 the Ever-victorious Army was disbanded. Whatever may have been the failings of the force, want of courage was certainly not among them. Out of one hundred and thirty foreign officers, thirty-five had been killed and seventy-three wounded; and among four thousand Chinese soldiers, five hundred and twenty had been killed and nine hundred and twenty wounded. Few heavier losses, proportionate to strength, can be found recorded in any similar length of war. And now looking back, after twenty-four years have passed away, at this campaign, which to many wears the aspect of a chaotic and confused capturing of cities, rapid marches, sudden stormings, and dreadful carnage, what are the salient features that stand out to view? What was the true nature of the service rendered by Gordon to China, and what the real lesson which might have been learnt from the campaign?

It has been said that Gordon saved the Empire of China; that is an exaggerated estimate of his service. The Empire of China is far too old and too vast an institution to be saved or lost so easily. One has only to glance at the area of the action of the Ever-victorious Army, and to compare it with the mighty Empire outside, to realise the value of such an assertion. The service rendered by Gordon to the Chinese was very great. His presence gave vigour to their plans, thought to their councils, rapidity to their movements, courage to their soldiers. He climbed to a far higher standpoint than they ever could have attained to, and surveyed the

entire theatre of the struggle from an eminence they could not reach. In fact, he taught the Chinese how to make war, and, what is still more important, how to end war. His blows were struck in vital places, and followed each other with a rapidity that left the enemy no time for reparation. He suited his strategy to the peculiar nature of the country, and timed his tactics in exact accord with the habits of his enemy. Indomitable resolution, inexhaustible resource, sleepless activity, were his master qualities. The distrust of English leadership, which previous experience or prejudice had engendered in the minds of his officers and men, soon gave place to complete confidence, and, no matter how difficult the labour or how stubborn the resistance, the belief in the final triumph of the undertaking which their leader had conceived never wavered. The indirect advantages to China which the presence of Gordon as a leader gave were scarcely less important to the cause of order. The scandal of the sale of English munitions of war to the rebels received a check, and although it would have been too much to expect that a commercial activity which had for its chief commodity the sale of a slow-consuming poison would have drawn the line of conscience strictly at any more sudden form of death, still there can be no doubt that the open supply of the rebels with arms and ammunition became, in the latter stage of the Taiping war, at least an unfashionable form of commerce.

But the lesson of this brilliant episode was neither to China nor to Gordon, it was to us. China might well be trusted to go on its own road as it had gone its way for two thousand years. Gordon knew himself and his

qualities before he ever pointed with bamboo cane the road of victory to his army, but to us the revelation was given that there was among us a man gifted with all the faculties of true kingship, a leader of men and a master, a veritable "spear," sharp and swift and self-wielding, and with a flash in its steel that could kindle the light of battle in ten thousand duller weapons. It was but a few years since, for the want of such a man as a leader, that we had lost everything but honour on the plateau above Sebastopol, and now, having found this captain, it was for us to guard him with safe keeping, to hold him for the evil day as the most precious of our treasures. Assuredly it was from no plethora of such possession that we could afford to waste or spend him in distant outside enterprise.

The last act of Gordon's service in China took place in 1864. During the succeeding score of years England was fighting in many parts of the world—South Africa, Abyssinia, West Africa, Afghanistan, and Egypt, but Gordon was neither in the councils that directed nor the armies that conducted hostilities. Nay, he was almost a stranger in his own land, and when nearly a generation had passed away, and the fruit of many blunders had accumulated in Egypt a load of disaster that seemed too heavy to be borne, Gordon was at last called from the obscurity in which he had been so long consigned,—he was, his own brother has told us, as "a person who was now heard of for the first time." "What must the man do to deserve renown?" once asked a disciple of his master, Confucius. "What do you call renown?" inquired the master. "To be known among the nations and at home," replied the disciple. "That is only

notoriety and not true renown," answered the sage; "this last consists in straight and honest sincerity, in love of justice, in knowledge of mankind, and in humility." Surely when the old seer was speaking these words the mists of two thousand coming years were being lifted, and he was looking at "Chinese" Gordon.

CHAPTER IV

GRAVESEND

WHILE Gordon had thus been climbing with rapid steps the ladder of fame in the service of a foreign nation, he had also been lifting himself with slower progress through the grades of his profession. In December 1862 he was promoted major by brevet in the army, and fourteen months later he received a second brevet as lieutenant-colonel "for distinguished service in the field." So far as promotion went he had not done badly during his four years' service in China, but in the wordly sense of bettering himself by the accumulation of money he had done nothing. Neither the reward of service nor his refusal to accept money gave him the least concern. "I do not care a jot about my promotion or what people may say," he wrote in 1864, "I know I shall leave China as poor as I entered it." That was his greatest source of satisfaction. We have already seen how he refused the Emperor's grant of ten thousand *taels* after the capture of Soo-chow; later on, when raised to the highest military rank, and given the yellow jacket which placed him among the chosen twenty of the Emperor's body-guard, he still grudges taking even the buttons on the mandarin's hat, "some of which are worth thirty or forty

pounds." "I am sorry for it," he says, "as they cannot afford it over well;" and again, "I would not take the money from them in their miserable poverty, and I feel correspondingly comfortable."[1]

It was no wonder the Chinese Government believed in the sincerity of this man who had served them. "They trust me more than any foreigner was ever trusted. I have never cringed or yielded to any of them, and they have respected me all the more." Truly a wonderful sentence this, and one that gives us the keynote to many things. On the strength of his faith in God, his disbelief in Mammon, and his absolute independence of mind and action, the Government and ruling classes of China looked on Gordon as a hero. On the strength of precisely these three things—faith, disregard of money, and straightforward honesty of thought and speech, he was in his lifetime not only without honour in his own country, but was regarded by many of the mandarin and ruling classes of his fellow-countrymen as a madman.

A high authority, writing in our own time upon events connected with the fraud and violence of certain English officials in India a century ago, has taken pleasure in the contemplation of the fact that "nobody now believes that Clive was justified in tricking Omi-chund by forging another man's name, that Impey was justified in hanging Nuncomar for the very offence for which Clive was excused or applauded. Although forgery is no grave crime according to Hindoo usage, and it is the gravest according to English usage, . . . the whole drift of opinion has changed, and it is since the trial of Hastings that the

[1] *Events in the Life of Charles George Gordon:* London, 1885.

change has taken place."[1] Nevertheless, if the whole drift of opinion has changed—with all respect to the great authority here quoted—the change is more apparent than real. One hundred years hence the policy that led to the annexation of the Transvaal and to the destruction of the Zulus under Cetewayo, and that still continues to force upon China a drug which murders her sons and depletes her treasury, will probably be looked upon as being as wholly unjustified as the deeds and doings of Clive and Hastings are now regarded. No doubt there is the difference between the sin of the individual and of the corporation, but it is extremely doubtful whether in purifying the action of the individual actor we have advanced one atom in the scale of collective morality as a Government or a nation. The "remote and unheeding ocean" in which the "cries of India" were lost is now brought too near our shores to allow the individual "avarice of age" or "the impetuosity of youth" to settle down as "birds of prey and of passage, with appetites continually renewing for a food that is continually wasting." But the feast of Indian spoil, if not partaken of so deeply by the few, is to-day eaten by the many to an extent never dreamt of by the most rapacious of the old-time vultures. If the Pagoda tree no longer grows its golden fruit the precious crop can still be gathered in the East, and the man who fails to harvest fortune when chance throws it in his way must not be astonished if he is looked upon, in life at least, as an oddity. That the soldier of fortune, who is ready to venture his life in the battle-field, should not be equally ready to make his fortune when it is to

[1] Mr. John Morley's *Life of Burke*: London, 1885.

be had for the taking, is a thing so strange to the eyes of the world that the "drift of contemporary opinion" would unhesitatingly regard him as an uncomfortable sort of person; and if to this dislike or disdain of Mammon he should add an all-abiding belief in God and a fixed faith in the purpose of Providence, he must elect to find in the circle of his professional friends and associates the significant gesture of the finger against the forehead, which is supposed equally to denote a human being as fit for Hanwell or for Heaven.

Gordon came back to England in the beginning of 1865, and a few months later was appointed to the command of the Royal Engineers at Gravesend. Six or seven years earlier an Italian fanatic had thrown a hand-grenade filled with fulminating powder at the Emperor of the French, killing some members of the suite. The fanatic, brought to trial, made little secret of his object, or base of operations. He wanted to blow up Napoleon the Third: the shell, the fulminate, and the plot had been all made and concocted in England. The case was such a glaring one that the First Minister of the Crown, although by no means prone to yield even the shadow of that right of asylum of which the nation was justly proud, felt it incumbent on him to draw the line between the right of asylum and the right of assassination. Although he was the most popular Minister that had held place for more than a generation, he was nevertheless at once defeated by a hostile vote and thrown out of office. Being a very old parliamentary hand, before many months he was back again as First Minister of the Crown. The lesson of defeat was not lost upon him, and an anti-French

policy was the trump card which regained him his popularity. There is in Chinese literature a poem, descriptive of England and the English, the work of a traveller from the Flowery Land: one verse in the poem runs thus:

"Afar in the Ocean towards the extremity of the North-west
There is a Nation or Country called England.
The climate is frigid and you are compelled to approach the fire.
The pious inhabitants respect the ceremonies of worship,
And the virtuous among them ever read the Sacred Books.
They bear a peculiar enmity towards the French Nation."

It was this last line which the great Minister remembered when he got back to office, and he at once proceeded to draw a blank cheque upon the panic of a French invasion. His draft was honoured at sight. Plymouth, Portsmouth, Dover, and the mouth of the Thames must be defended by circles of defensive works of the most costly description. Some twelve millions sterling was spent upon these constructions, enormous prices being given to the local landowners for their proprietary rights; and when the works were finished it was found that, being built in the middle of a transition period in the science of defence, they were already three parts obsolete. It was at the work of completing these defences on the Thames that Gordon was employed on his return from China in 1865. Of course his outspoken nature could not keep silent at this extravagant expenditure of public money; but he had yet to learn how small are the representations or protests of subordinate officers to check that wild waste of the people's hard-earned gains which seems to have become the inseparable accompaniment of a public work. "It can only be by the sacrifice of a

Chancellor of the Exchequer on the altar of public economy," wrote a prominent politician in a later day, "that the extravagant waste of public money can be cured." He, too, spoke in ignorance of the real depth of the disease. It will only be when the pinch of a widespread want will make the people of England demand of their masters, in a tone of voice not to be mistaken, "What have you done with our hard-made millions?" that the lesson of honesty—for *that* is the real root of the whole question—will be understood.

While Gordon was chafing under a sense of waste he was powerless to check, the evil was made all the more glaring to him by the poverty and want that he saw around him on every side. This he could do something to lighten: small, perhaps, compared with the great river of wretchedness which, side by side with the exhibition of riches, rolls its deepest and darkest currents; but however little the effort and the success, there was in it the opposite of that sense of helpless, tied-down inability to make less the evil of a great and highly organised system of extravagance. How hard Gordon laboured to lighten the lot of the poor during the six long years he spent at Gravesend is now well known; but like all things that attach to the memory of a man whose personality has passed beyond the reach of the world at the moment the world wants most to learn in every detail what manner of man he was, this page of life at Gravesend is liable to be overladen with the commentaries of admirers, who so often, in the absence of specific detail, insist upon creating incidents or distorting actual facts. Wherever I have been able to watch and weigh the life and acts of Charles Gordon, I find him

always even, practical, earnest, unemotional in his charity, full of sound common-sense, hitting hard and straight at poverty and vice, even as he hit hard and straight at Chinese city or stockade; no cheerier companion, no one with keener sense of humour or quicker power to catch the light and shade of life. It is perhaps inevitable that around such a man the extremist of every class and creed should endeavour to raise his own particular glass house of ethics or religion, and to make Gordon austere, enthusiastic, ascetic, fanatical, or peculiar; but the real Gordon was absolutely unlike such a creation; nay, in manner, mode of action, and method of life there was almost the opposite of these attributes. His life at Gravesend was that of a sound, common-sense Christian man, intent upon doing the best he could to better the misery that lay around him. Just as in fighting he knew the value of following up until the end was gained, so in his works of charity he did not limit his good offices to one relief in the long catalogue of human want: he was not content to teach the ragged boys of Gravesend, or to give them only a day's food and a night's lodging. He was too thorough a worker to be satisfied with patch-work benevolence. He began at the beginning, and did not leave off until the boy he had rescued from the gutter had found his billet on board ship, or in a situation. Nor did his interest end even with the safe placing of the boy in employment. "In his sitting-room," writes one who knew him intimately,[1] "Gordon had a big chart of the world, with pins stuck in it, marking the probable positions of the different ships in which his 'kings' (as he called them) were sailing. He thus followed

[1] Sir Gerald Graham's *Last Words with Gordon:* London, 1887.

them in his thoughts, and was able to point out their whereabouts to their friends when they came to inquire about them."

Those who would endeavour to withdraw the work done by Gordon into any particular groove or channel peculiar to their own views of religion would really do a deep injury, not only to his life, but, what is of more importance, to his life as it still lives to us in the example of its following. Gordon was no "saint" in the usual meaning which the world attaches to the name. He was utterly removed from the class of religious Church Militant who, as passing residents in some French or Italian city, are prone to hurl their hymns on the Sabbath morning at the heads of the native heretics; neither had he the smallest fellowship with another large class of persons who would divide religion into two parts —the muscular and the Methodist, one half John Bull and the other John Knox. Absolutely without a parallel in our modern life, Gordon stands out the foremost man of action of our time and nation whose ruling principle was faith and good works. No gloomy faith, no exalted sense of self-confidence, no mocking of the belief of others, no separation of his sense of God from the everyday work to which his hand has to be put; no leaving of religion at the church-door as a garb to be put on going in and taken off coming out; but a faith which was a living, moving, genial reality with him, present always and everywhere, shining out in every act of his life, growing and strengthening as the years roll on, filling the desert with thought and lighting the gloom of tropical forest, until at last it enables him to sit quietly and alone, watching with light heart and pleasant jest the

great cloud drawing nearer in which his life is to go down, but which to us is to make his name an unsetting sun in the firmament of memory.

The work that Gordon did during his six years at Gravesend is as simple as the work of light in darkness: he looked upon himself as a central point which could be used to lighten the misery around him. It mattered not on what the light of his charity was to fall: old and young, the rough sailor boy in the fishing smack, the street arab, the sick in hospital, the old paralytic wearing out the worn thread of life, the urchin in the Ragged School, or the hag in her garret, they were each entitled to their share. True, this light was only a rush-light in the night of the island's misery, but that did not matter to him; his work was to do what he could do to lift the load that lay near his hand, and if every home in England to which Providence had given wealth or knowledge would kindle such another rush-light in the heart of a single member, what an illumination would go forth over the land, what a mighty poor law would be born without aid of Parliament or Parish! The essential principle of Gordon's good work was its simplicity, as it must be the essential principle of all good work. There are millions of men and women—Sisters of Charity, Little Sisters of the Poor, Christian Brothers—whose work in the world is exactly what this captain of engineers' was. There is really nothing remarkable in the work, but there is a whole bookful or lifeful of wonder in the fact that it is done by a hard-toiling man of the world; that this man, who is trying as he walks to make straight the road, to fill up the ruts, and to kick the stones off the highway of life, is himself carrying his load all the time;

writing his official letters, drawing his maps of the Thames forts, and doing the rest of the routine of military life in England. And the secret of the ease with which he does all these things is a very simple one when it is known, the key to it being, as he himself has told us, "Give away your medal." The Emperor of China had given him a large gold medal for the Taiping war, and it was this, the most precious souvenir of his great campaign, which he had given anonymously to the Coventry Relief Fund when he arrived from China.

And all the time while this humble work is going on, while Bill and Tom and Jack are being provided with sea-kits for their voyages, while the old widow's fire is being lighted in her wretched garret, and the Ragged School boys are getting their dinner every week, the great fire of heroism is burning as bright as ever in his breast. The knowledge is there that he can lead armies to battle, and plan campaigns, and strike blows that have victory in their ring. This man who, in the world's rating, is stooping so low, has the stuff in him of which kings were once made.

There never was a man less like his pictures than Charles Gordon, and there seldom has been one whose personality it is more difficult to put into words. When height and hair have been described, when forehead and jaw have been spoken of, the real man is still as far off as ever. The Gaelic proverb, that "The strength of a hero is his heartiness," is true of the outward as well as of the inward man. Put Gordon in a room with a hundred of the average soldiers of our time, and perhaps nine out of ten human critics would pass him by with the rest; begin to talk to him, and before you had gone the

length of a dozen words on any subject you would be aware you were speaking to a man who was content to take his news from the newspapers and to make his opinions himself. But though a very few words sufficed to show difference from other men, the depth of that difference took a very long time to fathom. It is doubtful if even the men who knew Gordon best observed or suspected a tenth part of what was in him, for the very lightness of the surface deceived people. The blue eye sparkled with humour, the wit was always peeping out through the most sombre subject; between him and the accepted wiseacre of war or diplomacy there lay all the gulf that measures the difference between the Highlander and the Scotchman, between the Celt and the Saxon.

"His eye would appear to double in size as his talk would race galloping along," writes one who knew him very intimately; "full of similes and parables leading to his subject, so that you saw the picture he painted. He was the most interesting talker. He was the most cheerful of all my friends. . . . So merry and playful in the garden at Gravesend, with his ducks, on which he used to turn the hose. There was the Duchess of ——, who waddled her tail, and young Prince ——, who held his head so high. How the old lady ducks put their heads together and gossiped till he would souse them again with another douche from the hose. Each duck had a name, and, under Gordon's amusing talk, represented some human frailty or weakness. Wonderfully rapid in seeing the motives of others—for an honest man it was surprising how he could so readily see the crabbed lines of life—he understood and saw through all diplomacy, but he knew the shortest way to the end was by the straightest line. He had one motive only—the right; and his prayers or his nature saved him from selfishness, ambition, and the hundred other objects

that blind men to their end. He had never to wait to ask what motive should guide him. Had he been sent to Ireland he would have known whether it was Irish men, women, and children he had to consider, or an abstract and imaginary Ireland—it would not have been to enrich Gordon, to glorify Gordon."

In figure Gordon, at forty years of age, stood somewhat under middle height, slight but strong, active, and muscular. A profusion of thick brown hair clustered above a broad open forehead. His features were regular, his mouth firm, and his expression when silent had a certain undertone of sadness which instantly vanished when he spoke. But it was the clear blue-gray eye and the low, soft, and very distinct voice that left the most lasting impression on the memory of the man who had seen and spoken with Charles Gordon—an eye that seemed to have looked at great distances and seen the load of life carried on many shoulders, and a voice that, like the clear chime of some Flemish belfry, had in it fresh music to welcome the newest hour, even though it had rung out the note of many a vanished day.

In England there has long been an idea prevalent in the minds of many persons that the soldier should be a species of man distinct from the rest of the community. He should be purely and simply a soldier, ready to knock down upon word of command being duly given for that purpose, but knowing nothing of the business of building up; leaving that important branch of life to Mr. Civil Commissioner This and Mr. Civil Administrator That. It is needless to say that Charles Gordon held a totally different view of the soldier's proper sphere of action, and with him the building part of the soldier's

profession was far more important than the breaking part. The surgeon who could only cut off a leg or amputate an arm, but who knew nothing of binding up the wound or stopping an open artery, could not be of much account in any estimate of men. Gordon understood the fact that nations as well as individuals have pulses, that the leader who would lead to any definite end must know how to count these pulsations, and, in addition to his skill as a sword-cutter, must be able to do a good deal of the binding up of wounds, even though he had himself caused them. To say this is, of course, only to say that Gordon was great, in a sense greater than any merit of action in arms could aspire to. The nation that will insist upon drawing a broad line of demarcation between the fighting man and the thinking man is liable to find its fighting done by fools and its thinking by cowards.

While Gordon was thus living obscurely at Gravesend, monotonously following the professional routine of service at home, but finding in the labour which his work among the poor imposed upon him material and occupation for the employment of his wonderful energy, the world had emerged from two great phases of strife—the war between the Northern and Southern States of America, and the war of Germany against France. From each of these wars, so different in their causes, their courses, and their consequences, two vast forces had come to life, both utterly unforeseen by the specialists in politics, and both big with consequences to the future, the extent of which no man can even yet guess. In the Old World and in the New two immense military powers had suddenly made themselves apparent—one despotic, the other democratic; one stretching across Europe from

the North Sea to the Adriatic, the other touching the Atlantic and the Pacific; both bent on consolidating and securing themselves; and both conscious of possessing a reserved strength which was equally based upon the acknowledgment that the first-fruit of the earth belonged to the peasant.

But although the final effect upon the world of these two great powers still remains to be discovered, the immediate lesson taught by them was easy enough to read. When Cromwell uttered his famous formula of war, "Trust in God and safe-keeping of powder," the safe-keeping of the peasant was an axiom of State-craft equally accepted. It needed not to be spoken; but when the new dispensation arose, and that division of a nation's labour was made which Mr. Ruskin has defined as "the brave men fighting, and the cowards thinking," the old foundations of the peasant and the plough, upon which prince, peer, parliament, and people all rest, became lost, and as these world-old truths sank out of sight, so there arose the idea that the soldier's part was to be a fighting one and nothing more. It was to scrape clear the old foundations again, to tear away the weeds and rubbish of two centuries of chatter and chaffer, that the moral of the great slavery-fight in America and the great territorial fight in Europe pointed. True, there were in these conflicts wonderful revelations of new powers of destruction, new tactics in the battle-field, new possibilities of numbers, and new developments of organisation; but above and below all these lay the old, old fact of leadership and serviceship, the captain who was a thinker as well as a fighter, the soldier who was a tiller of the soil before he was a killer of men.

How we in England learned the lesson of these two wars may best be judged from the present position of the population of England, about eighty per cent of which is resident in cities; and from the other fact that shortly after the conclusion of the second war, and while we were apparently much in earnest about reorganising our military strength, the most active spirit of our time—the man possessing the largest share of leadership, who had alike shown extraordinary aptitude for cool calculation and for daring; the man whose human sympathies, keenly alive to the wants of every class in the national scale below him, and nobly honest and straight in his dealings with those above him, made him indisputably the national sheet-anchor in times of danger—this man was permitted to bury himself—in very weariness of that feeling which he had himself described as "being chained to the barrack square, seeing if the men's belts and gloves were well pipe-clayed"—in the most distant depths of a savage continent, his life for six years to become the chance of every accident which climate, treachery, or hostile natives might bring about.

In the end of 1871 Gordon, still a lieutenant-colonel in the army but only a captain of engineers, proceeded once more to the Black Sea to act as British Commissioner on the Danube, in accordance with a stipulation in the Treaty of Paris. He remained in this post for two years, during which he visited many of the old scenes of nineteen years earlier; saw again the grass-grown lines, the mounds and tombs of the great siege, and the battle-fields whose names, despite so many later colossal conflicts, were still bright in memory.

The main provisions of the Treaty of Paris had

already been torn up by Russia under the cover of the great Franco-Prussian war, and it was now clear to the world that a few years more would bring about a renewal of the old strife between Muscovite and Turk. During 1872 and 1873 Gordon travelled much through Bulgaria, sketching the military positions which he thought might soon become the scenes of fighting. In these travels in Bulgaria he gathered an intimate knowledge of the ways and means of Turkish government. "Have nothing to do with the Turk. I know him well, he is hopeless," he once said to the writer of these pages, when, early in 1877, the long-foreseen struggle between Russia and Turkey was about to open.

At Constantinople, in November 1872, Gordon met Nubar Pacha at the British Embassy. That far-seeing Egyptian Minister soon noted the vast difference that lay between the officer of engineers and any other English official with whom he had ever come in contact.[1] Clearly this rich treasure in soldier-shape, now floating waif-like about Europe, was something worth securing. Here was the "Captain" whose "good leading" the best thinker of our time had been vainly asking for England, in England, a few years before, speaking wonderful words at the very place where this captain of engineers had been born, and in the hearing of many men who had been his associates.

"How many yet of you are there knights-errant now beyond all former fields of danger—knights-patient now beyond all former endurance—who still retain the ancient

[1] "England owes little to her officials; she owes her greatness to men of a different stamp," Nubar Pacha once said to the writer.

and eternal purpose of knighthood, to subdue the wicked and to aid the weak? To them, be they few or many, we English people call for help to the wretchedness, and for rule over the baseness of multitudes desolate and deceived, shrieking to themselves this new gospel of their new religion, 'Let the weak do as they can, and the wicked as they will.' . . . You think they (the people) don't want to be commanded; try them, determine what is needful for them, honourable for them, show it them, promise to bring it them, and they will follow you through fire. 'Govern us,' they cry with one heart, through many minds. They can be governed still, these English, they are men still, not gnats or serpents. They love their old ways yet, and their old masters, and their old land. They would fain live in it as many as may stay there, if you will show them how, there, to live, or show them even how, there, like Englishmen to die."[1]

As we read these words, spoken at Woolwich in 1869, and think that only a few miles away from the place where this prayer for a leader of men, for a knight who would sustain "the ancient and eternal purpose of knighthood," for one who would even teach us "how to die," went forth like a cry into the wilderness, there was living at Gravesend in absolute neglect, unnoticed and unknown, the one man whose heart, brain, soul, and hand were able to fill the void of that night which the speaker saw beyond all the gaslight glare of a false and rotten prosperity—"the pity of it all" is the first thought that comes to us—the pity of the fate that let this "Captain of good leading" waste his life in the deserts of Africa. And yet who would now have it otherwise? It was on the night of December 14th,

[1] See Mr. Ruskin's Lectures on "War" and on the "Future of England," delivered at Woolwich in 1865 and 1869.

1869, this prayer, that a knight might arise who would teach us how to die, was uttered at Woolwich. Fifteen years later to a day, on December 14th, 1884, Gordon was writing the last words that ever came to us from Khartoum: "*P.S.*—I am quite happy, thank God; and, like Lawrence, I have tried to do my duty." Surely the prayer had been answered.

CHAPTER V

THE SOUDAN

GORDON, having accepted Nubar Pacha's offer, reached Egypt in February 1874. He spent a fortnight in Cairo, had many interviews with Khedive Ismail and the Ministers, and then started, by way of Suez and Suakim, for his new command. We must pause a moment to sketch the dim and distant region and the work that lay before him.

Any person standing in the centre of the long bridge across the Nile at the Kasr-el-Nil in Cairo, and looking up stream towards the south, will see on his left hand gray sandstone hills which, beginning near the citadel of the city, stretch southwards out of sight. Below his standpoint flows the Nile, coming out of the south, a broad and rapid river. If the time of year be the month of August, the current is full-flooded, thick with mud, and swirling with the force of an immense volume pent between banks too narrow to hold it; if the time be February, the stream is shrunken to a tenth of its flooded volume, the colour is ashen or milky gray, and there is a wide margin of sand or dried mud between water and bank. All these changes of volume and colour are caused by conditions of climate and earth surface which can be explained from this point as well as from any other.

First let us take the mountain. From the sandstone ridge at the citadel a line of hills, gradually growing in altitude and broadening in width of base, runs south into enormous distance—runs, in fact, to the other end of Africa. Fourteen hundred miles south of where you stand this line of hills rises to a very lofty altitude, and spreads out into many ranges and groups of mountains, which are continued in snowy summits nearly to the equator; from thence it descends abruptly to moderate elevations, becoming merged into a rolling table-land.

It is this range of mountains which, in its culminating masses of Abyssinia and the mountains to the south of that country, forms the barrier that acts the twofold part of rendering Nubia and Egypt practically rainless regions, and at the same time sends the summer inundations to fertilise the long line of river and the far distant delta of Lower Egypt.

All across the vast breadth of the Indian Ocean from Australia to Zanzibar a never-ceasing south-east wind carries the millions of tons of water which the sun has drawn up from the tropical ocean, in vapour-saturated clouds to the east shores of Africa. The portion of this vapour which is carried by the monsoon against the Abyssinian highlands falls in a three months' continuous downpour, beginning in May: the portion of it which is borne on the wings of the never-ceasing south-east trade-wind is carried up the long slope of land that runs from Zanzibar to the centre of Africa, and is there precipitated in rain that lasts some eight months out of the twelve.

Thus Abyssinia sends out from the heart of its great hills a rush of water which, carried by many tributaries into the Blue Nile and the Athbara, begins to inundate

Lower Egypt in July, and continues to flood it during the three following months; and thus Central Africa sends, by the long channel of the White Nile, from countless streams and rivers that flow from the Equatorial Lakes and the Bahr Gazelle province, a steady stream which is fed with a rainfall that knows little intermission throughout the year. But for the Blue Nile, Egypt would know no inundation, and would be only a strip of fertile land along its river; but for the White Nile, Egypt would be a perfectly waterless land for six months in every year. So much for the river and the rain by which it is fed. Now let us look at the land which, under the name of the Soudan, is practically the region watered by the Upper Nile and its affluents.

For one thousand one hundred miles, as bird would fly, due south of Cairo, the entire face of the land, except the narrow strip by the very edge of the Nile, is all glaring sand—a dead, rainless world. Then begins a change: the sand disappears, grasses cover the face of the earth, forests are seen, vast marshes fringe the rivers, which wander with sluggish currents through hundreds of miles of tall, waving reeds. This indeed is the true Soudan—the "Country of the Blacks"—for in this humid region the Arab of the desert quickly sickens, the camel cannot live, the horse is unknown; here, entrenched in marsh and fenced with fever, Dinka and Shillook, Bongo and Unyoro, still hold their own—the outposts of the heart of Africa, the land between the lakes, the Congo and the Nile, into which the slave-trader has not yet come. It was this Province of the Equator, as it was called, that was to be the scene of Gordon's rule in the year 1874. But we must go back a few

years in the history of this region to rightly understand the work that has to be done there.

The exploration of the Equatorial Soudan is of recent date. It is little more than thirty years ago since the first organised attempt at trade was made there. This word "trade," in its African sense, has ever had but one practical meaning, it is trade in slaves; and the reason of this singleness of commerce in the Dark Continent is simple enough when one comes to study the dim interior of that vast region. Its sole productions practically consist of two articles, ivory and human beings—two ivories in fact, for men and women in the African trade have always been termed "black ivory"; and one article is the complement of the other in more ways than in name.

There are no roads in Africa, and if there were roads horses and oxen could not travel them because of the Tetse fly: ivory is heavy, and there is nothing to carry it to the sea except the heads and shoulders of men. These heads and shoulders, worth so little at home, become valuable in proportion as they are distant from home. Dinka, Shillook, Bongo, or Darfourian, brought down first as porters of tusks, were themselves converted into money as porters and servants for the households of the wealthy Turks of Syria, Egypt, and Turkey. When the white ivory got hunted out from the forest and the swamps, the "black ivory" still remained in bee-hive hut and mud-and-wattle village, and the slave-gang still plodded its weary way to the sea, the sole export of a miserable land.

Sooner or later the great fact will be known that interior Africa has one lasting article of export, and only

one. Ivory and ostrich feathers soon disappear: gum-arabic does not grow in the true country of the blacks: cassava and plantain are but the cabbages and potatoes of the people: men, women, and children still form the one sure and certain export, just as they formed it three hundred years ago, when the Elizabethan captain of war, Hawkins, carried the first cargo of slaves from Africa to America.

For many centuries a vague tradition existed in the East that the Nile had its sources in a land of great mineral wealth. The name of Nubia was itself supposed to indicate the presence of gold, and the reports of traders to the old kingdom of Sennaar, where gold was found in small quantities at the foot of the Abyssinian hills, tended to keep alive the impression of some great region of richness lying in the more remote interior. Thus when, in 1820, Mehemet Ali sent his son with a large army to conquer Dongola and the kingdoms of Berber and Sennaar, the examination of the country for gold was one of the chief duties entrusted to the expedition. But gold there was none. A small branch expedition, following the White Nile, reached about to the ninth parallel of north latitude, dug holes in the sand or mud of the great river, which was there still flowing out of the south, and returned to Sennaar. Thirty years later the slave-traders, having in the meantime wasted and depopulated the region lying between Khartoum and the ninth parallel, began to extend their trade, as it was called, into more southern lands. Following up the innumerable rivers which branched from the White Nile into the reed-covered swamps of the true Soudan, these traders pushed their

raids almost to the equator, producing far-spread desolation as they went. A few years later, English travellers starting from Zanzibar reached the great Equatorial Lakes, whose previous existence Portuguese missionaries had, centuries earlier, made the world aware of. These travellers spoke of vast fertile lands lying around the lakes. The Khedive of Egypt was a man of immense projects. The Suez Canal had just been opened with extraordinary display. There was no difficulty in obtaining money for anything: the Jew had always taken a deep interest in Egypt: Khedive Ismail was a good borrower, not particular as to interest, and ready to write his name, or rather the name of his people, for twenty millions if the brokers would give him—say, sixteen. So the pleasant years of the late sixties and early seventies went on. Railways, sugar factories, palaces, canals, French upholstery, steamers, were made or bought or built; and, among other things, it was decided to form a great Egyptian province in the centre of Africa, which in time, perhaps, would draw to the valley of the Nile a vast trade, and would eventually open the whole interior of Africa.

Thus was begun the policy of extravagance and extension of dominion which has resulted, in less than twenty years, in such ruin to Egypt. So far from the Nile valley becoming a highway of commerce, or a channel for civilisation to spread into the interior, it is to-day more sealed against trade than it has been since the century began. The outposts of Egypt are now where they were in 1819, and the vast region of the middle Nile, whose conquest and possession cost so much life and treasure, has lapsed back into its original

darkness. Truly the Jew has taken a terrible vengeance upon the land of his captivity.

Moving with his usual celerity, leaving staff and baggage to follow, Gordon reached Khartoum on March 13th. He had come by Suakim and Berber, and had been learning as he came. "Things cannot last long like this, they are paying thirty-six per cent for money," is the last remark he makes before quitting Cairo. At Suakim the rottenness of things has become still more apparent. The "spoiling of the Egyptians" which had been going on by Europe is too much for him. "Duke of This wants steamer—say six hundred pounds; Duke of That wants house, etc., all the time the poor people are ground down to get money for all this. If God wills, I will shake all this in some way not clear to me now."[1] Thus he wrote in 1874. The shaking of it was indeed to come about soon enough, but the real spoilers were not to suffer in the catastrophe, at least for a time.

Looked at in the light of later events, this first entry of Gordon into Khartoum has a strange interest for us. The Governor-General met him at the palace-steps with troops, fire of artillery, and music: there was good news too, for only the day before an express had come from the south to say that the *sudd*, the terrible floating mass of vegetation which had so long barred the way to the upper river, had broken asunder, and the Nile was now clear to Gondokoro, one thousand miles beyond Khartoum. In three weeks he might hope to reach his seat of government, and, as Governor-General of the Equator, would be at home.

[1] *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa:* London, 1884.

After a week's delay in Khartoum he is off again on his road, guns firing parting salutes, and the rest of it, Governor-General Ismail Yacoob no doubt watching his departure with many inward thanks to Allah that this curious, busy, restless, eye-piercing, honest Frank is no longer near to worry with questions, to talk to slaves, and visit hospitals, and take interest in schools, and do sundry other utterly un-Turkish things that no Pacha could be expected to understand, and with many an inward chuckle, no doubt too, at the prospect that lay before the new Governor-General of the Equator, whose high-sounding dominion was in reality a united kingdom of swamps, *sudd*, and slaves.

The steamer goes slowly along, but all the wild life of the great river is new, and there is much to study—black and white storks, troops of monkeys with tails carried straight in air, hippopotami with their blunt noses only protruding out of the water by day, but visible enough by moonlight as they go "walking about like huge islands in the shallow water," and here and there wild-looking natives, who run back from the river-banks when they see the glasses of the traveller pointed towards them.

About two hundred miles above Khartoum there is an island called Abba, in the White Nile, a spot at this time of no importance, unnoticeable in the long length of Upper Nile's inanity. A steamer leaving Khartoum and steaming at the slow rate which Gordon's steamer was doing would have been passing this island of Abba on the fourth day of its journey. Describing the events of that fourth day there is this passage: "Last night, March 26th, we were going along slowly in the moonlight,

and I was thinking of you all, and of the expeditions, and Nubar and Co., when all of a sudden from a large bush came peals of laughter. I felt put out, but it turned out to be birds, who laughed at us from the bushes for some time in a very rude way. They are a species of stork, and seemed in capital spirits, and highly amused at anybody thinking of going to Gondokoro with the hope of doing anything." A chance coincidence, no doubt, but a strange one too. In a cave among rocks in the Isle of Abba at this time there was living a dervish, one Mahomet Achmet, who was already of some repute in the Arab Soudan, seven years later to be known far and wide as the Mahdi. Were they birds of ill-omen, these storks, that thus vexed the night with their weird mockery, as the boat that carried the stranger who was to attempt the hopeless task of righting this dark land passed by in the moonlight? The stork is held sacred among Mohammedans. "The stork knoweth her appointed times," says the great prophet of doom. Did these Soudan storks see the "appointed times," the years ahead in the lives of the two men whose life-orbits at this spot now first came together?

Still steaming up the great river they arrive at Gondokoro on April 16th, twenty-six days from Khartoum. The full reality of the desolation of the land he had come to slave in was now visible to Gordon. All the novelty had worn off. "No one can conceive the utter misery of these lands," he writes; "heat and mosquitoes day and night all the year round." Six days before reaching Gondokoro they passed a deserted station, where twenty years earlier an Austrian mission had essayed the hopeless task of teaching. Out of

twenty missionary priests fifteen were lying buried under the banana trees, whose long leaves were now the sole relic of the mission.

Arrived at Gondokoro, the last nakedness of the land is revealed: there is no government, no taxes, no anything. "The only possessions Egypt has in my province," writes Gordon, "are two forts, one here at Gondokoro, the other at Fatiko; there are three hundred men in one, and two hundred in the other. You can't go out in any safety half a mile."[1] The soldiers had been looting and cattle-lifting in the usual Soudan fashion: the slavers are at work further away to south and west. Single-handed Gordon can do nothing in this sea of misery. It will be quicker to go back again to Khartoum, pick up his staff and supplies, and return with them to Gondokoro; so, after six days spent in this wretched place, he turns back, and is at Khartoum again in eleven days. The staff and baggage are at Berber, and thither Gordon goes to meet them. By the end of May he is back once more at Khartoum, giving Ismail Yacoob further bits of his mind—heavy bits too. "I think I have crushed him," he says; "told him he told *stories*. It was undiplomatic of me, but it did the governor-general good."[2] Then he is off again for the equator.

And now begins the work of forming posts, making the soldiers till the ground instead of robbing the people, getting news of the slave-traders, learning the habits and customs of the natives, catching all traders that come in his way, and relieving, whenever he is able, the misery of the wretched people around

[1] *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa.* [2] *Ibid.*

him. He has already discovered that the seat of the mischief lies at Khartoum, as later on he will find that Cairo is the base which sets going Khartoum. It is a wretched existence, but, bad as it is, there is for Gordon something worse.

"I prefer it infinitely to going out to dinner in England," he writes; "the people here have not a strip to cover them, but you do not see them grunting and groaning all day long as you see scores and scores in England, with their wretched dinner-parties and attempts at gaiety where all is hollow and miserable. . . . I took a poor old bag of bones into my camp a month ago, and have been feeding her up, but yesterday she was gently taken off, and now knows all things. I suppose she filled her place in life as well as Queen Elizabeth." "A wretched *sister* is struggling up the road, but she is such a wisp of bones that the wind threatens to overthrow her, so she has halted, preferring the rain to being cast down. I have sent her some dhoora, and will produce a spark of joy in her black and withered carcase."[1]

So vivid are these bits of Soudan life which he gives us that we are tempted not to break their context. Notwithstanding the dhoora, the "bag of bones" dies two days later. "I daresay you will see," he writes to his sister, "this black sister some day, and she will tell you about it, and how Infinite Wisdom directed the whole affair. I know this is a tough morsel to believe, *but it is true.* I prefer life amidst sorrows, if these sorrows are inevitable, to a life spent in inaction. Many a rich person is as unhappy as this rag of mortality."

More and more the conviction grows that there is nothing but slaves in the land. "There can be no trade,"

[1] *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa.*

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he writes, "for they have nothing to exchange for goods. Poor creatures, they would like to be left alone." In September they are in the midst of the rains, and the country has become a vast swamp. The staff are falling fast. The intrepid Linant is already dead. Anson was also gone: two or three are unable to move, the rest are skeletons: Gordon is himself "a shadow." "However, I am quite well, but my temper is very, very short, and it is bad for those who come across me the wrong way." What a life of ceaseless worry it is! His lieutenant, Abou Said, the notorious slave-dealer, whom he has taken upon the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief, is already showing true colours—full of deceit, lying, setting the natives against the governor-general, taking bribes, and generally conducting himself as all those who knew his previous history thought he would. The employment of this notorious slave-dealer and brigand seemed to many to be a mistake, but Gordon knew his own work best. Through thick and thin he had stuck to this new-found ally, whom he had brought from Cairo. "All the people are dead against Abou Said, but I am faithful to him, and trust to a higher power to bring me through," he wrote from Khartoum. At Berber the governor was "dead against him." Notwithstanding all these hostile demonstrations Abou was taken on and made second in command. "I feel sure he will be the most useful man I have got," Gordon writes from Gondokoro. Later on, "I mean to support Abou Said against Raouf Bey," he says; but Abou is too great a scoundrel and has at last to be dismissed. The presence of elephant-tusks proved too much for the old trader: he is caught at his tricks and sent back in

disgrace, fortunately before he can do half the harm he intends to do, but not before he has already worked sufficient mischief among the black soldiers to last a long time; nevertheless that before his backsliding Abou did the work he was wanted to do, and was no failure to his employer, stands on record in Gordon's own words.

A few miles above Gondokoro there is a rapid in the river, and to this place Gordon determined to move the station, building a post at the foot of the falls, which was named Rageef. Here in the end of September he pitched his tent. Illness still clung to the different members of the expedition. "The rain is something tremendous; it comes down in such sheets and with such force—a good slope will scarcely carry off the water. The Nile runs down very swiftly some three knots an hour, an oily-looking stream," he writes. The ground is higher than at Gondokoro, and the climate is better than at the lower station.

Death and sickness have already removed most of the staff, but the Governor-General of the Equator works away all the same, never giving in for a moment. "I am quite well, and things go on smoothly," he writes, "and I have a conviction that, God willing, I shall do much in this country. The main point is to be just and straightforward, to fear no one or no one's saying, to avoid all tergiversation or twisting, even if you lose by it, and to be *hard to all* if they do not obey you. All this is not easy to do, but it must be my aim to accomplish it."[1] Wonderful words these, written in the dull depths of this land of death on September 23d, 1874.

[1] *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa.*

Ten years later, on September 23d, 1884, a solitary English soldier sat writing in Khartoum these words: "As for evacuation, it is one thing; as for *ratting out*, it is another. I am quite of advice as to No. 1, but I will be no party to No. 2 (the rat business), 1st, because it is dishonourable; 2d, because it is not possible (which will have more weight), therefore if it is to be No. 2 the troops had better not come beyond Berber till the question of what will be done is settled, so I will end this book.—C. G. Gordon."[1]

He had just received news that an expedition of British troops was to be sent to Khartoum, and he closed the first book of his journal with the words last quoted. The other words, written ten years earlier, had been long forgotten by writer and by readers, but they had not been lost: "God willing, I shall do much in this country." Was it not of a man set in authority, having under him soldiers, and saying unto one, "Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh," that the words had been spoken eighteen and a half centuries before, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel"?

Here then, at Rageef, the last months of 1874 pass away. Despite rain, disease, and desertion, shape and design are being stamped by the energy of this soldier upon the dull inanity of this mournful land. The stations are being formed which are to extend from Khartoum to the great lakes: steamers are being brought up in pieces to be put together above the impediments to navigation. Colonel Long has been sent on an embassy to King M'tesa of Ugánda in Lake Victoria, and he has returned, after many adventures, to report a

[1] *Khartoum Journals:* London, 1888.

practicable waterway to the neighbourhood of that monarch's dominions.

As Christmas draws near, the isolation of the centre and source of all this effort becomes more profound. On December 16th he writes, "The whole of the original staff except Kemp have gone down, eight in all. I will have no more fellows up here." "No man under forty should come here, and then only those who are accustomed to these climates," he had written a few months earlier. "Why did I come here? you ask," he writes; "the thing slid on little by little. I felt too independent to serve, with my views, at Malta, or in the corps, and perhaps I felt I had in me something that, if God willed, might benefit these lands, for He has given me great energy and health, and some little common sense." Then his mind flies off to the world of "honour" which he had voluntarily quitted. "Never shall I forget what I got when I scored out the inscription on the gold medal. How I have been repaid a millionfold!" (This was the Emperor of China's medal, which he had sent anonymously to the Coventry Relief Fund, having first obliterated the inscription.) "There is now not one thing I value in the world. Its honours, they are false; its knicknacks, they are perishable and useless; whilst I live I value God's blessing—health—and if you have that, as far as this world goes, you are rich."[1] So closed the year 1874.

Gordon was not the man to turn aside from anything he had once laid his hand to. This dream of a Central African Empire had taken deep hold of his mind, and although each month made more fatally manifest the

[1] *Letters from Central Africa.*

wretchedness of the land and the hopeless nature of the natives, he would not abandon hope that things might prove better when once the lakes had been reached. This Nile river was only the road to the real objective, and already he was looking about for some alternative route by which communication with Cairo might be effected on a shorter line from Lake Victoria than that along the Nile. Mombaza Bay, two hundred and fifty miles north of Zanzibar, seemed to offer a base distant from the east shore of Lake Victoria about four hundred miles, and seizing the idea of making that place the sea-port of a line by way of Suez, he proposed to the Khedive to take possession of it early in 1875. From Mombaza the party would then "push towards M'tesa," and, the line once established, he proposed to "give up Khartoum and the bother of the steamers, etc." "It is the only mode of helping these inland countries," he thinks; "all the northern part of my province is marsh and desert, useless for any one; the rich parts are the lake districts." Meanwhile the lakes had still to be reached from the Nile side, and to that task Gordon bent all his efforts during the early months of 1875. Many obstacles had to be overcome. A native chief of the Bari tribe was inclined to oppose his passage. It was necessary to "take his cattle." "I do most cordially hate this work," Gordon writes, "but the question is what are you to do?" so two thousand six hundred head of cattle are captured from Sheikh Beddan of the Bari. A few days later it transpires that it was not the cattle belonging to the recalcitrant Beddan that were "lifted," but those of another and a friendly sheikh. When the discovery is made, the captured cattle are at

once given back, "although it was a matter of perfect indifference to my interpreter," writes Gordon, "whether I had attacked a friendly or an unfriendly sheikh." "I have done with raids after my misfortune with my friendly sheikh, and only if attacked will I sanction reprisals, and I will also see whether I have not given cause for attack." This necessity of being severe upon the natives sits heavily on his mind. "It is not the climate, it is not the natives, but it is the soldiery which is my horror," he says. His whole soul revolts from this work of killing or harrying the people, and already he is looking forward with joy to "seeing some hope of being rid of the whole affair." Once the boats are on the two lakes he "will say good-bye." There is at this time a statement of the case of white *versus* black in one of his letters which so exactly sums up our own policy in South Africa towards Kafirs, Zulus, and Pondos that it deserves to be recorded word for word, even though its moral should now be all too late in application. "These are their maxims" (the white man's): "If the natives don't act after the most civilised manner, then punish them for not so acting, but if it comes to be a question of our action, then follow the customs of the natives—viz., recognise plunder as no offence whatever. They weigh the actions of ignorant natives after one and their own code; they act towards the natives after the native code, which recognises the right of the stronger to pillage his neighbour. Oh! I am sick of these people. It is they, and not the blacks, who need civilisation." The truth about this so-called spreading of civilisation in the Dark Continent is now apparent to Gordon, and his decision has been made—he will open the Nile to the

Equatorial Lakes and then say good-bye at the earliest date to "civilisation" in the Soudan.

And now midsummer has come, and it is time to be at work, hauling the nuggers and the steamers over the rapids that begin close above his station of Lado. It is more than four months since the steamers reached Khartoum, but as yet they have not appeared at Gondokoro. Of all the trials of life in the Soudan this waiting is the worst. "One cannot tell what a blessing employment is till we lose it. Like health, we do not notice these blessings. Inaction to me is terrible." In the absence of the longed-for boats he turns his hand to anything. Out of an old garden-pump which Baker had left at Gondokoro he makes a rocket-tube. Watches and clocks are repaired, and a musical box of M'tesa's, which had been given to that potentate and had gone the way of all musical boxes, is set right, and sent up again to Uganda. All this time correspondence with Cairo has been brisk, and as Gordon never had two measures in his dealings with man, the Khedive probably heard more truth in these last few months than he ever had had told him before in his lifetime. Truth is seldom palatable to princes, least of all to Eastern princes, and the very possible contingency of finding his dismissal in the official packet of letters from Cairo was often discussed in Gordon's letters home. "Some might care if they were dismissed," he says, "as the world would talk. Thank God, I am screened from that fear. I know that I have done my very best, as far as my intellect has allowed me, for the Khedive, and I have tried to be just to all; so if I go, do not expect to see your brother broken-hearted. . . . I acknowledge to

feeling a sort of regret if I have to leave before opening the river to the *lakes*, but it would soon pass off, as I should think it God's will that I should not do it." But, to do the Khedive Ismail justice, he had not the faintest idea of parting with this most faithful servant; on the contrary, he was in reality ready to go almost any length to retain the man who, if his words rasped sometimes like a file, was true as truest steel to his employer.

Of all the rivers on the earth the Nile is the one which gives fullest scope to make "the absent always wrong."[1] The man who works at the Nile frontier must expect to have his work and his motives, by the time they reach Cairo, rent and twisted and tortured out of shape, as though they had in concrete and bodily form been sent down the windings and cataracts and whirlpools of the great river. But Ismail knew the man who was at the head of the sap which was being run into the centre of the Dark Continent, and doubtless he knew too the intervening "reflectors" of the far-off work. This was the one really bright spot of Gordon's toil during all these years. He, and not his enemies, was listened to in Cairo. At length everything is in readiness for the trial of the nuggers that are to carry the sections of the steamers up the rapids. On August 3d the labour began. The river was running like a mill-race, and was still rising: the natives had become quiet, and many of them were even ready to aid in hauling the boats through the cataracts. Few who have not gone through this labour of forcing up the rapids of the Nile can understand the true meaning of

[1] Spanish proverb.

Gordon's description of the toil, and of the effect it had upon his nervous system. "A day of agony to me," he begins.

"I am really quite exhausted—more mentally than physically. It has indeed been a fearful day; one nugger nearly sank. It is the violent eddies that are so terrible. The slightest faltering in the haulers would be fatal. Your brother" (he is writing to his sister) "prays the nuggers up as he used to do the troops when they wavered in the breaches in China, but often and often the ropes break and it has all to be done over again. However, I feel sure that we shall have fully made known to us the mystery of these matters. Sometimes I think I am punished for some arbitrary act I have been guilty of, for the soldiers have tried me sorely. I do not feel that I ever could do any more work after this command. It certainly takes the edge off one, and adds to one's age."

Five days later, when all the native boats have been got over the worst part of the Googi cataract, there is a bit that tells what the strain has been better than long pages of description. "Somehow or another I am not so elated at our hitherto success as I thought I should be. The anxiety has killed enthusiasm in me. I never have had such an anxious time," he writes. The great heart of the toiler was beating for a moment slower in the recoil of the strain that had conquered those rapids; and well it might, for of all the fights of life that whiten hair and dig wrinkles before they are due there are few that compare with this battle of man against the cataract strength of Nile's flooded volume.

The cataracts passed, there still remained the natives, and each step now taken forward added to their hostility. For days past they have been getting more excited: the

women and children are busy carrying away from the wattle-huts the poor household gods of their scantiest possession. By day the spearmen stand on the hilltops looking from afar at the work going on upon the river: at night the *Coojoor* or magic fires are to be seen. At last the conflict comes: a party of soldiers under Mr. Linant has crossed the river with the intention of burning some native huts, the inhabitants of which had made an attack on the previous day. Gordon, thinking that the burning might tend to distract the attention of the natives from his steamer, now in the rapids, assented: the party, some forty all told, crossed the river, and spent the day foraging about the east shore. In the afternoon they were set upon by the enraged natives, and only four escaped. It was almost the first of a series of events of the kind destined to be but too common a few years later. "The natives are brave fellows," writes Gordon, after describing this disaster; "they know that our soldiers cannot hit them in most cases when they fire, and so in they rush and it is over." "The wretched black soldier is not a match for a native with spear and bow; the soldier cannot shoot, and is at the native's mercy, if the native knew it." Then he decides to put a fortified post on the east side of the river, and train his men to fight the natives. Then comes a significant passage: "The worst of this is, the way it ties me to one place, the uncongeniality of the work, and the fact that I may *train the natives* by my training my soldiers. It is a difficult question, which God will solve." Then he goes on in his usual way of thinking aloud, that mental habit by which his mind is absolutely laid bare, so that there is not a single lesson of his life that cannot be

traced through its every train of thought and every prompting of his nature.

"We derided these poor blacks who fought for their independence, and now God gave them the victory. I declare, in spite of the expressions you may note in my letters, I truly sympathise with them. They say, 'We do not want your cloth and beads; you go your way, and we will go ours. We do not want to see your chief.' This they have said over and over again. They have said, 'This land is ours, and you shall not have it, neither its bread nor its flocks.' Poor fellows! you will say I am most inconsistent, and so I am, and so are you. We are dead against our words when it comes to action. We will at morning prayers say forgive as we forgive, and then hurry over breakfast to carry on the squabble of the day before."[1]

There is nothing so remarkable in the life of this man as his perfect sense of justice; nothing can upset the even balance of his mind in the cause of right against wrong: no matter what self-interest is in the scale, no matter how much disaster to his own side may lie in the triumph of his enemy, he can never lose sight of the original cause of quarrel, and the justice of the native right to the possession of the land. Even the poor "magic men," the *Coojoors* of the Baris, have the dignity of men praying to the God of Battles for help against the enemy who has come to attack them.

"Did I not mention the incantations made against us by the magicians on the other side," he asks, "and how somehow, from the earnestness that they made them with, I had some thought of misgiving on account of them? It was odd, this repulse so soon to follow. These prayers were earnest prayers for celestial aid, in which the prayer knew he

[1] *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa.*

would need help from some unknown Power to avert a danger. That the native knew not the true God is true, but God knows him, and moved him to pray, and answered his prayer."

A few days later an expedition is sent out at night to harry one of the offending tribes. It fails in effecting the capture of the cattle, and the cause of the failure is laid upon the sheikh who was to have guided the party, but who failed to do so. It is proposed to punish this sheikh. Gordon won't have it. "If he did mislead them," he writes, "he was a brave, patriotic man, and I shall let him go." Later on we read: "I let the sheikh go. Poor fellow, they had tied his hands so tight that they were quite swollen. How I hate the country and all the work!" Truly a different stamp of soldier this from the usual type of which history is so full. What a contrast to any among the long list of later heroes is this man, who, with all his humanity and all his tenderness of heart, is still by far the most successful conqueror of savage races, and the wisest ruler of them, too, that this modern England of ours has seen. As one reads the pages of Gordon's journal in Central Africa, which tell not so much of the immense work done on river and rapid as the thoughts that come to him during that work, the picture of the man grows and grows until he stands before us absolutely alone in his generation; and the thing that is so wonderful in this life and this work is not the loneliness or the labour, not the difficulties or the disease, not the figure of a single toiler undismayed at his task amid death and desertion—all these are common enough in the history of war and exploration, and without them victorious war

or successful exploration can never be accomplished—but what *is* wonderful to watch, and utterly without parallel in these modern times of ours at least, is the love of justice, the mercy, the gentleness, the loving-kindness, the generosity to enemies, the absence of all revenge, the immense humanity of the man. Never mind what it costs, he will do the right thing by this wretched Bari native. Sheikh Beddan has his cows returned to him, and is given a present. A war party captures the daughter of another hostile sheikh: she is at once dressed in the best costume that can be got in the stores, and sent back to her father. Nay, so strong is the sense of right and justice in the man that he is ever ready to take the part of the wronged, even when they are doing their best to kill him. It seems impossible for him to get into a rage with them. He is utterly unable to work himself into that fine frenzy of hostility against some black king who may happen to stand in the path of his progress, that state of wholesome hatred which is almost laughable to watch in the dealings of our race with the unfortunate sable monarchs whose lands we have been desirous of acquiring.

And it is this absolute absence of the truly Saxon element of hate that makes Gordon so often wish to be alone in the work he has to do. He feels that his sense of right is not the same as other men's; that where they would hang, he would often reward; that where they would burn and pillage, he would spare and protect; that where they would make what they called an example—a lesson, by the way, which would bear bitter fruit in the memories of revenge it was so certain to evoke later on—he too would make his example, but it

would be of mercy and kindness to the vanquished. The secret of Gordon's success as a ruler of savage or semi-civilised races was a simple one. It lay in his possession of two almost opposite qualities—an intense feeling of sympathy with them in every want and work of their lives, and a bodily energy or power of endurance which made him their equal in physical toil. His heart, soft as a woman's, was keenly alive to their suffering; his body, capable of the most prolonged exertion, was ever a tireless toiler for their welfare. Absolute necessity of this bond of sympathy between the ruler and the ruled was ever present to him. "Anything is better," he once wrote, "than the wretched want of sympathy between us and the Egyptians, which is now (1883) increasing into a deadly hate. We must have a Nemesis unless we show more sympathy." The end of 1875 came. It found the line of posts extended to Duffli, a spot on the Nile within three degrees of the equator. Close to Duffli the river was broken into a series of rapids and *chutes* which extended for two miles. It was a terrible disappointment to find the long-entertained hope of getting through to Lake Albert without further interruption thus suddenly dispelled. "I bore it well," he says, "and for all you could see it might have been a picnic party to the Fola Falls; but it is rather sad, and will give me a mint of trouble and delay." And so it did. Here for another three months the work of dragging and portaging went on. All around spread a sea of tall jungle grass: a dreary land where by day all the year round a fierce sun beats down between drenching showers, and where "the moment the sun goes down, a

cold damp arises which enters one's very bones. There is not an interval of five minutes from the setting of the sun and the rising of this dreadful damp, and you feel the danger, as it were, at once." Lake Albert is still some seventy miles distant. The Victoria Nyanza is two hundred away, and meanwhile there is trouble with Kaba Rega in front and the Bari in rear. The doctor, who was also interpreter, dies in October: the servant follows in December, and the year closes on the lonely solitary figure, fighting man and nature: one day down with ague, the next forcing his way through swamp and jungle; sometimes feeling "very low," and again speaking his thoughts of men and things with deep insight and light *badinage*, but always summing up the situation, be it death or failure, gleam of success or dark disappointment, with the brightest, the most simple, the most perfect faith that "whatever the world may say," he will content himself "with what God may say."

At length all the obstacles are overcome, and the first steamer, put together above the Fola Falls, emerges from the maze of papyrus isles and floating vegetation which hide the exit of the Nile out of the lake upon the Albert Nyanza. Gordon had all along declared he would not himself go on the lake, and he persisted in his decision. A lieutenant, Gessi, was to have the honour of first circumnavigating this sheet of water. This refusal of Gordon to reap the harvest of his own toil is so typical of the man that his words will alone show the thoughts that guided him in his decision:—

"I say I wish to give a practical proof of what I think regarding the inordinate praise which is given to an ex-

plorer. "Now surely Higginbotham[1] did much in getting up the stores; and through the desert, what work he must have had! Again, what work—not equal to his—have I not had with these stores. But all this would go for nothing in comparison to the fact of going on the lake, which you may say is a small affair when you have the boats ready for you. Others sow, and one will reap all the results of the labour. —— sent me a letter written to him which speaks of the honour and glory of going on the lake—the chaplet of laurels to the great conqueror, etc.! It is thus, therefore, that I wish to show palpably that it is a great mistake to draw the false conclusions people do about these things."[2]

It was the end of April by the time Gessi had completed the tour of Lake Albert. He found it much smaller than had been anticipated, fifty miles across from east to west, one hundred and forty from north to south, running into marsh and swamp at its southern end. Violent storms swept its surface. The natives along the shores, numerous and hostile, were crying out, "Go on, go on! We want no Turks here," so well had the knowledge of Ottoman character preceded the actual presence of the Turk. From April to October 1876 the old work of marching and mapping and fort-making went on in that dead angle of Equatorial Africa which lies between the lakes and the Falls of Fola. "A dead mournful spot, with a heavy damp dew penetrating everywhere. It is as if the Angel Azrael had spread his wings over this land." "You have little idea of the silence and solitude. I am sure no one whom God did not support could bear up. It is simply killing. Thank God, I am in good health, and very rarely low, and then only for a short time." Through this mournful land the river winds at

[1] An engineer. [2] *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa.*

times in currentless reaches amid isles of papyrus, it is often impossible to reach for miles the real s[illegible] so dense is this growth of water vegetation: in other places between the two lakes the Nile is a slant of water. Over this wide sea of rapid marsh, grass, and rolling hill, fierce sunshine and drenching rain alternate in quick succession, and at night the stagnant water in the hollows and the dense vegetation everywhere exhale poisonous malaria.

Victoria Lake had yet to be reached, but the emissaries sent thither by Gordon had not given a more favourable report of that region. M'tesa, King of Uganda, was the usual mixture of buffoonery, cruelty, and suspicion, which seem to constitute the chief ingredients in the composition of monarchical character in Central Africa. In the previous year, under the influence of Mr. Stanley's teaching, he had declared himself a Christian. He was now showing a decided tendency towards Mohammedanism, under the tuition of an Ulema sent to him by Khedive Ismail; but whatever were his religious doubts or convictions, there was one point upon which he had apparently made up his mind without much difficulty, it was to keep the white man, the Turk, and the Arab as far off as possible. "First come missionary, then trader, then soldier—when soldier comes, it is all over with black man." So poor King Cetewayo of Zululand had tersely summed up the case of black and white a few years earlier, and M'tesa had arrived at much the same conclusion.

At length the time came to turn northwards from this dreary equatorial land. On October 6th Gordon, having abandoned his intention of establishing posts on

Lake Victoria, set his face for Khartoum and Cairo. Amid a conflicting mass of thoughts as to his future proceedings one impression had been steadily growing; it was, that the existing state of things in Egypt and her Soudan dominion could not continue much longer. "When a house gives ominous cracks prior to a fall, one's desire is, like the rats in ships, to leave it, but this proverb is generally used in the sense of 'Having sucked the orange throw away the rind,' and I do not like the idea even if the cracks are serious. Why should I fear? Is man more strong than God? Things have come to such a pass in these Mussulman countries that a crisis must soon come about." Thus Gordon wrote at Khartoum in the end of October, and on Christmas Eve he was in London.

CHAPTER VI

THE SOUDAN (*continued*)

IN the three years during which Gordon had been buried in Central Africa the germs of great changes had been laid in the world of English dominion. A new spirit had suddenly been developed in the Government at home, and a policy of active extension of frontier had succeeded the hitherto long-accepted dogmas of masterly inactivity.

In December 1875 the order for the occupation of Quetta had gone forth to the Indian frontier. In September 1876 the order for the annexation of the Transvaal and its occupation by British troops was despatched to the Cape of Good Hope, and during the whole of 1875 and 1876 there were visible in the Levant, on the coast of Syria, and in Egypt many of the premonitory symptoms which close observers had little difficulty in reading as the certain signs of coming aggression in those regions. As yet, however, no outside opposition had followed these widespread extensions. The change had been so sudden, its presence had been accompanied by so much easy explanation of motive and intention, that the ruling impression on the public mind seemed to be more one of surprise that such facile

acquisitions should not have been earlier accomplished than that beneath them there might possibly lie any future trouble of war to the State.

Five years had to pass before the bill of this "active" policy was even to begin to be called for; and then by a mysterious and inexorable law of fate it was to fall, not upon the men who had originated and supported the new policy, but upon those who had persistently opposed it.

Gordon had left the Soudan in 1876 with the intention of finally quitting the Khedive's service, but at Cairo he was prevailed upon to modify his views so far as to still leave his return an open question. He had not been a fortnight in England before the old determination of saying good-bye to Egypt returned, and he telegraphed his decision to Cairo. In reply came a most urgent message from the Khedive, reminding him of his promise to complete the work which "you and I" had begun in the Soudan. It was impossible to refuse the urgency of this message, or the friendship of the words that conveyed it. Gordon, after a stay of five weeks in England, started on the last day of January 1877 for Egypt. He went out with the firm resolution of getting the Governor-Generalship of the entire Soudan conferred upon him, and of refusing any other appointment. His wishes were at once met by the Khedive, and on February 26th, four weeks from the date of leaving England, he landed at Massowah on the Red Sea as Governor-General of the entire Soudan.

And here we must stop a moment in the rapid life of this extraordinary toiler, to glance at the new fields of work that were now opening before him.

The enormous region which is known to us under the vague denomination of the Soudan falls, topographically as well as politically, into three distinct divisions. First there is the region of the Nile and its equatorial tributary rivers, where we have lately traced the work done by Gordon in the years 1874, 1875, and 1876: this division is the Central, or Southern Soudan. Next to it on the east lies the second division, which embraces the long line of the Abyssinian frontier, the province of Sennaar, and the coast of the Red Sea from Massowah to Suakim. The third division is that immense western land in which lie the old Mohammedan kingdoms of Kordofan and Darfour, great rolling plains upon which the heavy rainfall from the equator gradually dies out into a rainless desert. From east to west across the entire breadth of the three divisions is not less than twelve hundred miles: from north to south along the entire length of the centre division is about the same distance. In the three years just ended we have seen the work of exploration and settlement all confined to the Central African region, the line of the Nile. In the three years now beginning we shall have to follow Gordon through many thousand miles of camel-travel over the vast plains and deserts of the eastern and western divisions.

While Gordon had been fighting climate and natives on the borders of the Equatorial Lakes, the Khedive Ismail had been gratifying his ambition in another quarter of the Soudan by attempting the conquest of Abyssinia. The sale of the Suez Canal shares to England had put him in sudden possession of four million pounds sterling, and with these sinews of war he determined to brave alike the difficulties of the mountain fast-

nesses, where this relic of old Christian Ethiopia still holds its own, and the terrors of the curse which tradition asserts the prophet to have delivered against those of Islam who should ever attempt to subdue the mountaineers that had once shielded him from his enemies. The Egyptian invasion met with a disastrous repulse; the soldiers broke before the shock of battle began, and the story of slaughter, so often to be repeated in subsequent scenes of Soudan strife, had here its first beginning. Nine thousand of the Fellaheen soldiery, armed with Remington rifles though they were, fell before the determined rush of spear and sword. Tents, twenty-five cannon, a great number of prisoners, arms, and an immense treasure were the victor's spoil. The English sovereigns which the sale of the Suez Canal shares had lately put so plentifully into the Egyptian war-chest were scattered broadcast over the gaunt table-land of Gura, and so immense was the booty that the wild spearmen were unable to believe gold in such quantities could be brought together. It must be, they thought, some counterfeit of the precious metal. So strong was this impression that the Abyssinian soldiers are said to have disposed of their plunder for a mere trifle, often giving thirty sovereigns in exchange for a few silver dollars. The effect of this defeat of the Egyptian arms soon became apparent in remote parts of the Soudan. The news spread quickly that the good old times had come back again—the times when steel settled all differences, before guns had been heard of. The day of the Turk seemed over. Insurrection broke out on all sides—along the foot-hills of the Abyssinian mountains, as well as one thousand miles away to the west, where the Darfourian wanted small induce-

ment to rise against the conqueror he despised. It was into this wide sea of trouble that Gordon was now entering, with no very settled plan as to policy, but with a fixed resolve to work out each day's labour as it came to one great end—the lightening of the load of human misery wherever he might meet it; to establish order where there was anarchy; to unbind the slave; to stop the horrible traffic that was the root of so much suffering; to mix mercy with justice; to join government with honesty; and for himself?— to "sacrifice a living life." "To give your life to be taken at once is one thing; to live a life such as is before me is another and more trying ordeal. I have set my face to the work, and I will give my life to it. I feel as if I have nought to do with the government. God must undertake the work, and I am for the moment used as His instrument." Thus he communed with himself as, mounted on a fleet camel, he passed over the long wilderness of ridge and gorge, plain and valley, which lies at the northern frontier of Abyssinia; a land which has been the battle-ground of Christian and Moslem since that distant day which first saw the Arab—a newcomer from Mecca—forcing his way across the level plains that divided the mountains of old Ethiopia from the cataract-kingdom of Nubia. The Abyssinian frontier was in a state of anarchy. King Johannes, notwithstanding his victory over the Egyptians, did not venture to descend into the low country, and some of his great feudatory chiefs were still in revolt against him. Things might be safely left in their present state for some months longer; they could not get worse for the simple reason that an Abyssinian army, even if free from having to fight

against revolt at home, could not advance far into the low country for want of supplies. Gordon would therefore leave Abyssinia for the present, and turn his attention to the extreme western portion of the Soudan, where the Bedouin tribes and the slave-traders were in revolt against the Government. Accordingly he wrote a letter to Johannes, assuring him of neutrality during the coming struggle with Menalik, King of Shoa, and then turned his camel's head for the Blue Nile and Khartoum.

As leagues and leagues of distance lay behind him on this journey from Massowah to Khartoum, all the vastness of the work he had to do seemed to become accentuated by the physical space which daily passed before his vision. "With terrific exertion," he thinks, "in two or three years' time I may, with God's administration, make a good province,—with a good army, and a fair revenue and peace, and an increased trade,—also have suppressed slave-raids, and then I will come home and go to bed, and never get up again till noon every day, and never walk more than a mile."

It is now late in April; the heat is terrific, for as yet the heavy storms of rain that once every year descend upon the weary world of Sennaar have not yet begun, and the great, level land now lies a scorched and dusty plain where the rocks are shadowless at noon. It is early May when Gordon reaches Khartoum. He has "solved the difficulty," he thinks, though the "scheme is not yet matured." First he will strike a great blow at slavery in Darfour. What he has to do "is so to settle matters that I do not cause a revolution on my own death." The vested interests involved in this

slave-question are enormous; they touch every class in the community, and already he sees that in uprooting slavery he may bring the whole fabric of Egyptian government to the ground. On May 5th he is installed as Governor-General of the Soudan at Khartoum. "With the help of God," he says in his speech to the people, "I will hold the balance level." "A great sorrow has been taken off the land—the reign of the *kourbash* (whip) has ceased." He disbands the motley marauders known as Bashi-Bazouks; sets up a petition-box at the door of the palace; puts the money which is brought to his clerks as "backsheesh" for expected favours, into the treasury; has a quarrel with a Turkish second in command, one Halid Pacha; arranges for a better water supply for the town, and is then off on his camel for remote Darfour. He has been a fortnight in Khartoum: now he is away again on a two thousand mile ride to begin his blows against slavery.

On May 19th Gordon left Khartoum; on June 7th he reached the frontiers of Darfour, four hundred miles distant. He has a wonderful camel that flies along faster than the mythical *hygeen* of the prophet. The escorts are left behind; the secretaries and staff toil far in the rear. Dressed in the richly-embroidered uniform of a Turkish marshal, the Governor-General comes flying into a station, and before the guards can turn out and present arms he has passed the gates. The Bedouin chief who rides with him says it is "the telegraph." The ribbon of the Grand Cordon of the Mejidieh has been given to a special bearer from the baggage behind, who has promised to deliver the insignia to the Pacha before he can possibly get to Fogia, but it is no use; it arrives an hour after

the Field-Marshal has reached his destination. Never had Egyptian history recorded such extraordinary behaviour on the part of a Pacha. The Mudir of Fogia and the rest of the officials are completely out of time. There have been watchers set to give timely notice of the Governor-General's approach, and as a vast plain lies around Fogia upon which objects are discernible at an immense distance, it is hoped that no surprise can possibly be effected. All at once two specks are noticed by keen Arab eyes miles away to the east. All right, these are the advanced scouts sent on to give warning, there will be plenty of time for the Mudir to don his Stambouli coat an hour hence, and for the soldiers to fall in about sunset. The two specks draw nearer and nearer, and then it is seen that the leading camel carries a pale-faced man arrayed in gorgeous uniform, and that a Kababish Arab sheikh is the second figure. What can it all mean! Only this, that there has come into this vast, dreary world a new man, and that, dressed in stately trappings of the highest Turkish military rank, the most restless spirit of the nineteenth century has come to thunder at the stronghold of African slavery.

And now there began a series of rapid marches, sometimes forward, sometimes to right or left; opening communications from one post to another through revolted tribes; gathering up a garrison here to augment the small force that marched permanently with the Governor-General; concentrating at a given point; cutting off some tribe from its water-supply; sending messengers to revolted chiefs to threaten or to promise; freeing slaves and drilling them as soldiers; marching through storm and sun and night, until the bare record of the

work reads more like the movement of some race of beings who knew nothing of the needs of food and rest than of men to whom war and exposure brought the usual consequences of fatigue—disease and death. There is a peculiar trait in Gordon's method of war which makes it a matter of regret to the military student that it was never the lot of this brilliant soldier to find himself the leader of an army on the broad field of civilised warfare. Above every other English soldier of his time he possessed the power of catching the weak point in his adversary, and directing to that point all the strength of his own resources. Every great master of war has had this faculty fully developed. It is the root and foundation of successful offensive warfare; it is the quality that gives the largest results and produces the most striking effects. Turenne, Frederick, Napoleon, Stonewall Jackson, possessed this power, and to it they owed their most brilliant triumphs. With it almost everything is possible to a commander. Without it success may indeed crown the efforts of a captain, but it will be the success that stops short of great results, and makes victory depend more upon the exhaustion of States than on the genius of generals.

When Gordon entered Darfour all the chances seemed against his effecting the pacification of the country. His troops were of the worst description—the scum of Syria, Egypt, and Asia Minor, demoralised by unchecked pillage and frequent reverses. Their leaders, corrupt and craven of spirit, moved without plan or energy, plundering and oppressing as they went. The old hatred of the people against the Turk had increased to a deadly animosity under the influence of the stupid and ferocious tyranny

to which they had been subjected in the three years that had elapsed since the Egyptian conquest of the country. Added to all these things there was the fact that some of the best troops had been sent to fight the Russians in Bulgaria, and that the resources of the Soudan in men, money, and material were at the lowest ebb. Notwithstanding all drawbacks, Gordon in the short space of four months put down the rebellion and broke the power of the slave-kings.

Looked at from a distance Darfour appeared a confused mass of revolt: seen closer at hand the elements of weakness were at once apparent. There were in reality two great divisions in the disturbance, and these again were divisible into many sections; but the two chief parties in revolt were at opposite poles of discontent, and it was this diversity that gave Gordon the key to his triumph. Darfour had had a history, one that went back into a remote past. There had been sultans of Darfour long before there were kings in Prussia. There had been a trade, too, in Darfour that went back very far in its traditions,—it was the slave-trade. Now it was the partisans of these two things, throne and trade, that were both in revolt against Egypt, and were each opposed to the other. When Gordon was striking at the adherents of the old race of sultans he had the slave-kings at least neutral; when he hit at the slave-kings the Darfourians were with him.

Darfour is practically a desert, having wells scattered over its surface at distances varying from thirty to sixty miles apart. Between these wells the land is a waterless waste. Occupy the wells and you hold the country: this was the general plan upon which Gordon proceeded.

In four months, from June to the end of September, he moved like a cloud driven about by the wind, now west, now south, now north; but there was a purpose in these seemingly erratic wanderings. He has marched south from Omchanga to Dara, one hundred and sixty miles, in the first twelve days of July. By the middle of August he is back at El Fascher, one hundred and thirty miles to the north-west. By September 1st he is at Dara again. On the 9th he starts south-east for Shaka, a march of one hundred and eighty miles within ten degrees of the equator. On the 15th he reaches Shaka. By this time the throne-part of the revolt has been broken, and it is now the slave-kings he is fighting. They have thousands of good fighting men, they outnumber Gordon's troops by ten to one, but there is neither union nor plan nor leadership with them; and this extraordinary Pacha, who moves quicker than the Arab, who is heard of one day at Fascher, far in the north, and a few days later is seen in the red haze and whirlwind of the desert, striking for some extreme southern station, fills them with wonder. It is impossible that he can have only a few hundred men with him, they say, he must have armies within reach; and so they receive him with sudden submission, and the bands that have assembled to fight break up at night into separate portions and go their way back into some remoter security.

Of the misery of the wretched people, of the arid, hopeless land through which these scenes of war went on, no pen could fitly tell the story. War, famine, slavery were abroad in a horrible naked deformity that baffles description. The "rebels," as they are called, die

of thirst and famine in great numbers. "The smell of the putrefying dead (men and animals) is fearful." "People have little idea how little glorious war is. It is organised murder, pillage, and cruelty, and it is seldom that the weight falls on the fighting men; it is the women, children, and old people. The Crimea was the exception."[1]

It is on the slave-caravans that the horrors of thirst and hunger fall heaviest. The wretched groups, chiefly of women and children, are abandoned in the midst of blinding deserts. It is often impossible to find food for them, even after they have been rescued from their masters. "I declare solemnly that I would give my life to save the sufferings of these people," he says. "You would have felt sick had you seen them." Again he writes, "I am a fool, I daresay, but I cannot see the sufferings of any of these people without tears in my eyes."[2]

It was at Dara, in the south of Darfour, that the scene occurred which has been so often alluded to—the meeting of Gordon with the chief slave-robbers, who had assembled near that place in great force, still apparently undecided as to fighting or joining the Government. He reaches Dara after a ride of eighty-five miles in a day and a half, alone, the escort having been left miles behind. The heat is intense. "Imagine to yourself," he says, "a single, dirty, red-faced man on a camel, ornamented with flies, arriving in the divan all of a sudden." Then follows the account of the next day's work:—

"Dara, September 2d.—No dinner after my long ride, but a quiet night, forgetting my miseries. At dawn I got

[1] *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa.* [2] *Ibid.*

up, and putting on the golden armour the Khedive gave me, went out to see my troops, and then mounted my horse and, with an escort of my robbers of Bashi-Bazouks, rode out to the camp of the other robbers, three miles off. I was met by the son of Sebehr, a nice-looking lad of twenty-two years, and rode through the robber bands. There were about three thousand of them—men and boys. I rode to a tent in the camp. The whole body of chiefs were dumbfoundered at my coming among them. After a glass of water I went back, telling the son of Sebehr to come with his family to my divan: they all came."

There they received Gordon's ultimatum. They must disarm and go home. They have two days to think over it. Sebehr's son is for fighting, and there is much swearing on the Koran to assault the fort this coming night, but many of the other chiefs are not inclined to back him up. Even in the most savage of African wars the second string, diplomacy, is never forgotten. Separate negotiations are opened with the doubtful ones, and one by one they go away, or agree to stay as friends. At last Sebehr the younger gives in so far as to agree to go off, bag and baggage, to the south. This is on September 6th, and up to the last moment the question of giving in or fighting had been wavering in the balance. Had the slave-kings assaulted, there can be little doubt they must have carried all before them. "I have not the least confidence in my officers or men," wrote Gordon on this very day; "three hundred determined men would send them rushing to my house."

There remained one more thing to do before this chapter at Darfour was finished. It was to go to Shaka and, in that centre of the slave-trader's operations, receive the formal submission of the chiefs. Shaka was the head-

quarters of Sebehr Pacha's power (a name afterwards to become very celebrated in diplomatic despatches). Sebehr (as the name is spelt at this time in Gordon's journal) was in this year, 1877, at Constantinople, whither he had gone with Hassan Pacha, the Khedive's son, and the Egyptian contingent to fight the Russians. "Shaka is the Cave of Adullam; all murderers, robbers, etc. assembled there, and thence made raids upon the negro tribes for slaves," Gordon writes. On September 9th he set out with four companies of troops on camels and horses for the march to Shaka. It takes him only six days to cover the one hundred and eighty miles which lie between it and Dara. Here, too, the bold game is successful; the chiefs disperse in different directions, and in three days Gordon is again on the march, this time striking straight for El Obeid in Kordofan, across three hundred and eighty miles of misery. The first campaign in Darfour is over.

And now comes the question, one probably which the reader has often asked himself as he followed this brief record of incessant marching and widespread misery, What was it all for? What good result was attained? Alas! the question is already answered. It was of no use. Revolt, slavery, pillage closed behind the path of this dauntless soldier, as the Nile Ambatch, the floating *sudd*, closed again in the track of the toilers who for a brief moment had opened a passage through its masses. It was this sense of the hopeless nature of the work he was engaged in that makes the record of Gordon's work in the Soudan so sad. Bit by bit the truth is growing upon him that so far as this earth is concerned he might just as well be doing nothing. "I

returned," he writes at the end of this first three years' labour on the Equatorial Nile, "with the sad conviction that no good could be done in these parts, and that it would have been better had no expedition ever been sent." Now again in Darfour he was learning the same bitter lesson. The slave-trade is beyond his skill to cure. "I declare I see no human way to stop it," he says. "When you have got the ink that has soaked into blotting-paper out of it," he writes, on his long road back to Kordofan, "then slavery will cease in these lands." And so has it been wherever in the past we turn the long page of African war or exploration. Never get we nearer to the dawn. Never does the weary road of human effort bring us within sight of the end. For some inscrutable purpose is this vast continent plunged in a darkness which even the blood of martyrs cannot brighten.

There is in the record of Gordon's daily life in the end of this year, 1877, unmistakable indication that anger at the ignorance of English opinion relative to the slave-question was the ruling thought in his mind. He looks back over the dismal history of this terrible disease, and recalls the fact that we in England had been for centuries the foremost slave-carriers among the nations, and that our system of slavery was a more barbarous and inhuman one than the domestic form which exists in Egypt and the East.

What has been the work of emancipation and suppression done in the last fifty years compared with the vast sum of human misery inflicted by us upon Africa during the long interval between Hawkins' first slave voyage in the reign of Elizabeth and the date of

emancipation in 1830, a period of two hundred and fifty years? Who built the long line of slave-castles (prisons) that still stud the sandy surf-beaten shore of Equatorial West Africa? What was it that made Bristol the chief port in the kingdom, and that first caused Liverpool to rise from the mud flats of the Mersey? Was there not an article inserted in the Treaty of Utrecht, of which Her Gracious Majesty Queen Anne thus speaks in her message to her Lords and Commons in the year 1712: "Because of the part which we have borne in the prosecution of this war, entitling us to some distinction in the terms of peace, I have insisted and obtained that the *Assiento* or contract for furnishing the Spanish West Indies with negroes shall be made with us for the term of thirty years;" and did we not hold fast by slavery and its horrors until the fortune of war had reft from us five-sixths of our possessions in America, and left the United States and Spain the chief gainers by the trade?

The real moral of all this Gordon knew well enough when on his road to the slave-den at Shaka he wrote these words: "I do not believe in you all. . . . The Christianity of the mass is a vapid, tasteless thing, and of no use to anybody. The people of England care more for their dinners than they do for anything else, and you may depend on it, it is only an active few whom God pushes on to take an interest in the slave question. 'It is very shocking! Will you take some more salmon?'" How then, it may be asked, if Gordon saw that the work he was doing was being written in sand which the first sweep of the desert wind would obliterate, did he still keep his hand to such a furrowless plough, and set his life against such a hopeless venture? Often during these

long, solitary rides, as he listens to "the cushioned footfall of the camel," he asks himself the question—nor has he long to wait for the answer: "I go on as straight as I can," he writes, "I feel my own weakness, and look to Him who is Almighty, and I leave the issue without inordinate care to Him."[1]

And he will not desert the Khedive in his extremity. "I can only feel that I would not desert this government for anything that could be offered me, for it would be indeed cowardly." "I will use my very life to aid him" (Ismail). Finally, in a passage written on his road to Shaka, the whole heart of the man speaks out the thought that is in it about the work he is doing. "Find me the man," he says, "and I will take him as my help, who utterly despises money, name, glory, honour; one who never wishes to see his home again; one who looks to God as the source of good and the controller of evil; one who has a healthy body and energetic spirit, and who looks on death as a release from misery; and if you cannot find him then leave me alone. To carry myself is enough for me—I want no other baggage."

In November 1877 Gordon, having visited Khartoum on his road from Kordofan, reaches Merawi on his way to Wadi Halfa, whither he is going to see what can be done to push on the railroad from the latter place to Dongola. Shortly after leaving Merawi, a despatch from Khartoum catches him, announcing an invasion of the Eastern Soudan by Abyssinia. He turns back at once towards the threatened point, only to find the intelligence false. Strange, indeed, are the trifling accidents upon which the lives of men turn. Had Gordon passed

[1] *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa.*

Dongola before this false message reached him he would have gone to Wadi Halfa, and seen for himself the paramount necessity of completing the line of railway through the wilderness of the "Batn el Hager" (Womb of Rocks), uniting Egypt to Dongola and the Soudan. And then? Ah! then history might indeed have taken another course, and those terrible cataracts would not have been so many barred gates against the expedition seven years later, the forcing of which had to be done in the shred of time that yet was left to this great life on earth.

He turns back at once from Dongola for Khartoum; three weeks later he is under the shadow of the Abyssinian hills, and by the end of the year is once more at Massowah on the Red Sea. The Abyssinian imbroglio is as far off settlement as ever. The king keeps repeating in his letters that "Gordon is his brother, but that the Khedive is a man without God; that God will judge the cause of quarrel between them, and that the whole world knows the ancient frontier of Abyssinia." Evidently this state of things will keep some little while longer.

Whither next? Back to Khartoum, travelling by sea to Suakim, and thence across the desert to Berber. Passing the town of Shendy, on the Nile, a telegram reaches Gordon from the Khedive in Cairo. The day of reckoning has come at last; the bond-holder is tightening his grasp upon the Khedive, and behind, in the shadow of the Jewish money-lender, England and France, for the moment acting in concert, are already feeling their way towards the conquest of Egypt. "Come at once to my assistance," writes Ismail, "I know

no one who can help me so faithfully in the difficult time that is impending." A fortnight later Gordon is in Cairo. Three days before he reaches the capital he has cut his own salary from six thousand pounds to three thousand. He has heard of the rush which has already begun of English officials to Cairo, and as a protest against the injustice of making the impoverished Fellaheen pay enormous salaries to strangers, he makes this reduction in his pay. He is received by the Khedive with extraordinary honours. Ismail has waited dinner an hour and a half. Dirty, and covered with the dust of the long railway journey, Gordon has the place of honour given him at table; but before they sit down, the trouble that is weighing upon the Khedive has been told to his guest. "Will Gordon be president of a Committee of Inquiry into the state of the finances of Egypt?" M. de Lesseps has consented to act as a member of the Committee. The Commissioners of the Debt are not to be on the Inquiry, as they have been hostile to His Highness. Such was the substance of the Khedive's proposal. Looking back at this scene in the Abdeen Palace, and on the intrigues that went on during the next few days among the rival foreign diplomats in Cairo, whose one object was to defeat Gordon's proposals and to drive him back to the Soudan, it is difficult to repress a feeling of animosity against the men on whose shoulders must most justly rest the responsibility of having destroyed, and deliberately destroyed, the sole chance which the presence of an incorruptibly honest and far-seeing man at the head of a Committee on Egyptian Finance would at that time have given to Egypt. Nothing could have been simpler than the main condi-

tions proposed by Gordon; they were these: First, examine exactly what is the real income you derive from all sources of taxation. This inquiry will take some months to complete; meanwhile you must pay the unfortunate officials and employees, many of whom have been left absolutely without their salaries in order to meet the outrageous interest which is being paid to the Jews and bond-holders of Europe. While you are doing this you must suspend the payment of the coming coupon, and finally reduce the interest of the whole debt from seven to four per cent.

All too fair was the proposal, all too honest the man who made it, to meet with the approval of the men who were now at work upon Egypt. If at this time of the year 1878 the world had been searched to find two men of the highest integrity, purest motive, and most commanding genius, no better couple could have been discovered than these men, Lesseps and Gordon—the greatest civil and the most celebrated military engineers of their age. Their names were at once a guarantee that their work would have been above suspicion. But, in truth, honest men were not wanted either by the bond-holders of Egypt or by the rival powers who were hankering after her flesh-pots. Ismail had summoned to his aid the one man who might have saved his throne and his country, and that man must be got rid of as soon as possible. He was got rid of. Opposed on all sides, snubbed by the English Government officials, rudely answered by English Ministers, turned into ridicule by the hirelings of the Press in Cairo, and plotted against at the Palace and the Consulates by Pachas, Commissioners, consuls, and the whole tribe of Cairene intriguers,

Gordon went back again to bury himself for another couple of years in the Soudan, while Ismail and Egypt, Pachas and intriguers, went drifting down to a gulf which held in its depths many red days and dark dates —Alexandria, Tel-el-Kebir, Tamai, Abu Klea, Khartoum; failure, loss of life, of treasure, of time; and one date to rise as the unchanging landmark of a future memory—January 26th, 1885.

There is a scene described by Gordon in his letters[1] that is strangely interesting when looked at through the events that were so soon to follow. It is a meeting between Gordon, Lesseps, and others of the Pacha and Commissioner circles of Cairene life, which takes place in the large reception room of the Kasr-el-Noussa Palace, outside Cairo, "a palace full of lights, mirrors, gentlemen to wait on you," as Gordon describes it. Just seven and a half years later than this meeting, in this same hall of dazzling light, a brilliant throng has gathered. The great Nile Expedition has begun, and a large share of the military life of England is assembled in the reception room of the palace. All the wax lights of the massive chandeliers and heavy gilt candelabra are ablaze. The general commanding the expedition is the centre of a brilliant throng of officers. Everything is running smooth; the first steamer carrying the boats that are to ascend the Nile has been signalled from Alexandria; the troops are already *en route* from Cairo to Assouan; stores and munitions are being pressed forward. Hope is high; those who are nearest the centre of authority are the most confident of speedy success, and many of

[1] *Events in the Life of Charles George Gordon*: London, 1885; p. 114.

them are offering wagers as to which of the two great festivals of English life that bring their worshippers to Epsom and to Ascot will find them again in London. Suddenly there is a loud crash—one end of the great room is darkened—the massive candelabrum that stood on the marble pier set round with mirrors has fallen forward into the room, quenching its hundred lights, and smashing into pieces its crystals and its gildings. There is a dead silence; no one was near the spot; no gust of wind had blown down the great golden candlestick; the big claws upon which it rested have suddenly snapt off near the base, and the heavy weight has toppled forward into the room. After a minute or two there is an attempt to revive the conversation, but it is no use—a cloud has fallen upon the throng. It was only an accident, to be sure; but all the same the betting upon the return in May is not quite so keen. In the throng gathered at the Kasr-el-Noussa that September night there was not a man present whose memory or inclination could put together the two scenes through the intervening seven years. It was in this room that the work of the salvation of Egypt which Gordon had come to do was baffled. It was here he had written, when disgusted with the intrigues and duplicity that had been too much for him, these memorable words, "Every one laughs at me, but I do not care. I am much worn, and I wish I had my rest, but it will not come till I have done His work. I scarcely see any one, but remain in my sulks, wishing and wishing that my end had come." Seven years pass away, and at last the end has come. At last we seem to know him. We are sending out our thousands of men

and opening wide the money-bags of the nation to save this great heart so long neglected by our rulers, and we are about, too, to make this relief of Gordon into another plank in the platform of our national pride—and then? Was there not once a prophet who beheld in a vision a "candlestick all of gold, with many lights and lamps upon it," and asking the meaning of the strange sight he was told, "This is the word of the Lord, saying, Not with an army, or by might, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts"?—an answer which neither men nor nations, no matter what may be their might or power, can ever do wrong to remember.

In May Gordon is back again at Khartoum, having in the interval, since leaving Cairo, visited Zeila and Harrer on the Red Sea, opposite Aden. At Khartoum, for the first time in his tenure of office, he has now opportunity to sit down at the mass of administrative office-work. Everything is in a mess. All these wars and revolts, explorations and annexations, have left matters in sad confusion. During the previous year the expenditure had been two hundred and fifty-nine thousand pounds in excess of income. "I am at war," he writes in July, "with nearly every one in Cairo, and my crest is a thistle. I could justify my rows, for they arise from dishonest officials, undue interfering of consuls, etc. Since the long camel-rides are at an end I have no nice thoughts." But with all the office-work, the want of money, and the squabbles with Cairo officials, he is "striking daily deadly blows against the slave-trade." The Soudan summer drags its slow length along. With September comes the sickly season, and Gordon is down with fever. "I was so unwell," he writes, "in my vast, lonely house,

quite alone. I used to wander up and down it and think, think for hours. It is a very great comfort to me never to have the least fear of death when I am ill. I declare I never did more work than I did in my brain, uselessly, during these two nights. Imaginary petitions were presented. I gave the answers; but over and over again they came up, till one was almost wild with them." Men in comfortable libraries or cushioned reading-rooms scan lightly over such entries as these; only the few who have gone through such African fever sufferings know what torture they mean.

The year 1878 draws to a close; the outlook is worse and worse; there is a revolt in the Bahr Gazelle province. King Johannes and his rebellious vassal, Waled el Michael, are again at war; and the cry from Cairo is for money, money, money. The bond-holders and their backers have now got their fingers round the throat of Egypt, and Ismail is at his wit's end to keep the semblance of his sovereignty. "Altogether," writes Gordon in November, "things look as if they were coming to a crisis in every direction. You can form no idea of what shifts I am put to for even fifty pounds."

When the hours of work are over, the evenings sit heavy upon this great, lonely soul. "The dulness is almost insupportable," he writes, "one lacks books; and I scarcely ever see any one except on business, for I have no associates. I am nearly always nauseated—not ill, but with a feeling of sickness." Still through it all come the flashes of humour; the quaint contrast between life in savagery and civilisation; the ample insight into the selfish strife going on at Cairo; the keen criticism of the conceit and pompous ignorance of officialism; and, above

all, the same unchanging faith that everything is for the best. Here in this great, gaunt palace he spends many a lonely twilight hour, speaking his thoughts as he used to do in the equatorial forest and in the deserts of Kordofan. In the existence of a place of future punishment he finds it at this time hard to believe. Yet never lived there man who in his own life had seen more of the vast sum of human wrongdoing which has to be righted somewhere, and on which no sword of justice ever lights in this world. He does not seem to have asked himself the question, If I am shooting and hanging these makers of orphans, if I am punishing with stripes and chains these sellers and buyers of human flesh, and doing it in the name of Truth and Right, is the Great Judge of all to be denied His right to use the sword of justice upon those who are beyond my reach? Are nine-tenths of the evil-doers on earth not only to escape the penalty of their crimes, but often and often to be favoured reapers in the harvest of the world's success? You catch the common robber, or the man who steals, perhaps through starvation, penury, or through knowing no better, and you imprison him for years or for life; and is the rich usurer who has wrung the widow's farthing from her, is the fraudulent banker, is the unjust judge, is the cruel spoiler of war to pass from a world that in millions and millions of cases gave them wealth and honours and stars and garters instead of ropes and bars and gallows, to go forthwith to free pardon, to everlasting light, and endless rest beyond the grave? It would indeed be strange justice that meted to Jude and Judas the same measure of mercy in the final judgment.

While Gordon had thus been engaged with the details

of government at Khartoum, the revolt in the Bahr Gazelle province had spread into wider area, drawing to it all the floating discontent of Darfour, and threatening to spread northward into that province. An able lieutenant of Gordon's, an Italian named Romulus Gessi, had taken the field against the insurgents in the Bahr Gazelle in the summer of 1878, moving from the Nile near Gondokoro. The operations were long and difficult; many rivers had to be crossed, and an unusually wet season flooded the channels. The province known as the Bahr Gazelle lies at the headwaters of the many streams which, converging into a single river in the tenth parallel of north latitude, form the White Nile. Beyond the Bahr Gazelle, to the south, lies the great slave preserve of the Niam-Niam, beyond which, again, no modern traveller has ever penetrated. This region of the Bahr Gazelle is really the central spot which has given birth to most of the Soudan trouble, as we know it. Thirty years ago there entered the region a certain powerful Arab sheikh, named Zebehr Rahama. To say he traded in slaves is but to say that he was an Arab chief of the Soudan. The slave was, and is, as necessary to the Arab, the Turk, and the Mohammedan generally, as the broad acre is to an English peer or the bank-note to the merchant. But Zebehr Rahama was a good deal more than an owner of slaves, or a trader in them. He was by far the ablest man which Arab Africa had produced in the century. He was more than a leader of men; he not only could conquer, but could govern. About the year 1868 Zebehr established his authority over a very wide extent of country at the headwaters of the western tributaries of the White Nile. Had he

been no more than a slave-dealer he could never have created the power which so rapidly rose around him. It is true that no Arab on the west of the Red Sea could boast a purer pedigree, coming direct from the Anzars of Medineh; but he had other claims to the right of government besides blood. He could organise armies, lead them to victory, and consolidate his conquests. His capital at Dem Sulieman was the resort of many traders; and though slaves were there freely bought and sold, ivory and ostrich feathers and the skins of wild animals were ten times more numerous than they are now, and these articles, together with gum, tamarinds, and copper, were bartered for the products or manufactures of Syria, Egypt, and Europe.

Here it will be well if, pausing a moment in the record of Gordon's life, we glance at that institution of slavery which he spent so many years of toil in endeavouring to combat. Slavery in Africa is the natural, or unnatural, product of two causes—the external demand which, though once universal, is now confined to Mohammedan countries, and the internal state of savagery which makes war the normal condition of the negro tribes of the interior continent. This normal condition of warfare among the negroes is still further complicated, so far as the question of slavery is concerned, by the horrible practice of cannibalism which prevails among tribes beyond the limit of the trader's operations. In other words, the captives taken in war in Central Africa are killed and eaten where there is no trade; where trade exists they are sold. If we go back in our own history only one thousand years, we shall find much the same state of things existing, but without the

cannibalism. If we go back fifteen hundred years we shall find even that revolting part of the parallel also present. The problem of African slavery, reduced to its simplest conditions, stands thus: war is the unchangeable habit of the savage races; war produces captives; there are two roads open to these unfortunates—death or slavery. The closing of one road crowds the other with a denser multitude. But out of these general conditions spring many other ramifications of the slave question. Domestic slavery is part and parcel of Mohammedanism. Mohammed was himself a servant before he was a prophet; and many of the greatest leaders and most devoted soldiers that the creed of Islam has produced have been slaves. There is a vast gulf between the domestic and the predial slave. The rights of the first named were carefully guarded under Mohammedan law; and once within the pale of Islam the lot of the slave was a very different one from the fate of his brother negro under a West Indian planter. So long as a state of warfare is the normal condition of any portion of the earth, so long will slavery be, to a certain extent, a mitigation of the sufferings of the beaten ones; but it is when a higher form of life has been reached, when strife is not the rule but the exception, that slavery becomes the terrible evil which it is in our times; for then cause and effect have changed sides, and instead of war producing slavery, slavery is made the reason for war. And the higher the so-called civilisation becomes, the deeper grows the villainy of the traffic. For, as the luxury of the master in Damascus or Cairo demanded a larger number of domestic slaves, the competition at the remote Darfourian frontier grew keener. If the natural

wars between the negro tribes could not supply the demand, wars were made for the express purpose of procuring slaves; and the frontier of Islam had ever around it a wide zone of depopulated territory. How was this terrible plague to be stayed? A thousand times did Gordon ask himself the question, and at the end of his labours he was as far off from the solution as ever. Where was the evil to be attacked? Was it in the heart of Islam at Cairo, Damascus, and Constantinople? Was it in the centre of the long "Arbain" road between Central Africa and Egypt, in its hundred links between the first "Gellab" trader in Darfour and the last merchant in Assouan? Or was it at the source of the supply in the regions south of the Bahr Gazelle, where in regular armed bands the Arab slave kings hunted their prey?

Look at it as he might, there seemed no means by which the trade could be stopped. Slavery lay at the very root of Mohammedan life. Of what use were conventions made with foreign consuls in Cairo when every man, woman and child, every Pacha, Bey and Bimbashi, every Mudir, Vakeel and Nasser-el-Kisim was, heart and soul, a supporter of slavery? And, in truth, the full hopelessness of the task becomes apparent to any person who will take the trouble of reading for himself the years of fighting that went on in England before the emancipation of the West Indian slaves could be effected. And what were the West Indian slaves? They were a speck in the Empire. Their masters did not represent the one thousandth part of the wealth and possessions of Great Britain. Yet with what a struggle and at what a cost was the manumission effected. Now let slavery be an institution penetrating every branch of the

State, from the throne to the village household, and let the traffic in slaves be the most lucrative business carried on through six-sevenths of the Empire, and then you will have some idea of the enormous difficulties of stopping it. Bit by bit all this had come home to Gordon, yet his sanguine nature would not admit he could be beaten. At last, after five long years of struggle, he is forced to confess the evil is beyond his power. "I declare," he writes on March 31st, 1879, in the midst of that vast four hundred miles of desert which lies between El Obeid and Shaka, "I declare if I could stop this traffic I would willingly be shot this night. This shows my ardent desire, and yet, strive as I can, I can scarcely see any hope of arresting the evil."

One thing is certain, that the extension of Egyptian dominion into the Soudan added impetus to the slave-trade. It threw open the traffic to hundreds of agents, where before it had been confined to scores; it literally made the trade a free one. Gordon might toil as he pleased, but what could he effect when his own officers, soldiers, and officials were secretly or openly themselves engaged in the traffic?

There was indeed one hope for the suppression of the Soudan slave-trade, but the line upon which that might have been effected was the last which the Egyptian Government would have followed or permitted. It was the establishment of a really strong kingdom under a despotic ruler in the region of the Bahr Gazelle, such a man, in fact, as Zebehr Rahama. It has been the fashion to credit this man, Zebehr Pacha, with every enormity, but the real facts of his life are at variance with such a character. Zebehr aimed at empire and dominion

instead of mere wealth and possession. It suited his enemies in Egypt, who feared his rising power, to paint him as only a king of slave-dealers. It is true that he bought slaves, but he bought them to conquer and not to trade with. He had already learnt the great secret, that a man was a more valuable item to him as a soldier and a subject at home than ever it was possible for that man to be valuable to him abroad. A powerful empire in Central Africa would act as a dam to stop the flow of slaves to Egypt. Zebehr Rahama had all but established such an empire, when in a weak moment he left his kingdom of Mandugha, went to Cairo in 1876, and was there detained a prisoner at large. By what promises he had been brought to the capital, or whether he went there of his own inclination, will not be known perhaps in our time, but so far as human sense can read the troubled page of Soudan history one thing is clear, if Zebehr Rahama had reigned in the Bahr Gazelle and Darfour there would never have been a Mahdi, and a mournful chapter in our history would not have been written. In the early months of 1879 Romulus Gessi, marching westward from the White Nile, had penetrated into the centre of the Bahr Gazelle. Sulieman, the son of Zebehr Rahama, was at the head of the revolted tribes. Around him had gathered the discontent of all the borderland of Darfour and of the slave-traders, whose occupation had been so much disturbed during the last two years. For Sulieman Rahama's quarrel with the Egyptian Government there was ample cause. Not only had the kingdom of Mandugha, wholly founded by his father, been taken away, but the government of Darfour, a country which his father had conquered for the Khedive,

had been given to a stranger. Nor was this all. His father had gone to Cairo to put his claims directly before the Khedive, and he had been treacherously detained there as a prisoner. If ever the right of revolt against injustice and tyranny has had cause to excuse it, it was when Sulieman Rahama rose against the Government which had first taken his father's possessions, then robbed him of his conquests, and finally made him a prisoner.

To aid Gessi in his invasion of the revolted provinces Gordon sent a force from Darfour to co-operate against Sulieman, and in March 1879 he himself started from Khartoum for Darfour, to be in closer touch of events in the Bahr Gazelle.

It was the hottest season of the year, when the sun, after passing the equinoctial, pours a terrible flood of heat and glare over the northern tropic. "What a country," he writes, "with districts as much as two hundred miles long and broad without water." On March 27th he arrives at the ancient frontier between Kordofan and Darfour, where he had hoped to find water, "but the wells are nearly dry. We expected to find water sufficient for the camels, some forty,—there is not enough for two!!! The nearest wells are one and a half days off, and the camels are exhausted. I must go all night and try thus to avoid the heat." All next night the weary caravan plods along. There is a halt a couple of hours before daybreak, and camels and men lie down in the sand for a short sleep. One would imagine that the utter weariness of mind and body produced by this protracted exertion under such terrible conditions would have worn to a standstill even the restless brain of this tireless toiler, but it is not so. "During the long ride,"

he says, "I was able to see my way to crush out the slave-trade." Then he gives the fruits of his night-thoughts: there must be a system of passports and a general registration of occupation. For the moment it all seems promising enough. He gets it down upon paper, thinks it over, and is still satisfied, but a day or two after the reality of the struggle comes back again, and he has no glimmering of hope. The *sudd* closes in the Nile as fast as it is opened, the simoom blots out the camel-tracks almost as soon as they are made; the slave-curse of Africa is stronger than the blotted paper of a thousand statutes. At the best he sees it must be a lifelong work. "Could I sacrifice my life," he asks himself, "and remain in Kordofan and Darfour! To die quickly would be to me nothing, but the long crucifixion that a residence in these horrid countries entails appals me. Many will say it is a worthy cause to die in. I agree, if the death was speedy, but oh! it is a long and weary one, and for the moment I cannot face it." Go on, great heart, thy moment is not yet come. Thou art not alone in this immense desert. God has something still in store for thee to do, and the life thou art ready to give to these dark races shall be asked of thee later on, as a message to the children of unbelief among thine own people who now know nothing of thy greatness.

Still on to Shaka. A day before reaching that distant place Gordon hears that Gessi has broken the neck of the revolt, but this momentary clearing of the atmosphere brings up a host of other troubles. There are twenty-five thousand black soldiers in the Government service in Darfour. They are all either captured or bought slaves. What is to be done with them? There

is no money, the troops have not been paid for nearly two years; the men and their wives are more than half naked. "It is very fortunate there are only black ladies here," Gordon writes from Shaka, "for the poor wretches are not clad." Cairo is still calling out for money. "When the nakedness of my troops is partially covered I may talk to you," replies the Governor-General. "I do not care what I say," he writes, "for I feel very confident that the way I could pay these people off best would be to throw up the post, for no one would keep the incendiary materials of the Soudan quiet until he had been here some years. It is only by hard camel-riding that I hold my position among the people."

The next two months are a long camel-ride. In the beginning of May Gordon is at Kalaka, in the tenth parallel of north latitude; on the 14th he is at Fascher, two hundred and thirty miles to the north; on the 26th he reaches Kolkol, two hundred miles to the west; on June 5th he is back again at Fascher. There he receives a telegram from the Khedive telling him to come to Cairo at once. Ismail is at the very end of his lease of power, and again he sends a despairing call to the one faithful servant who can be of use to him in his extremity. Gordon prepares to obey the summons and sets out for Cairo, but again the fates intervene, and he turns south to prevent a union between the slave-dealers and the followers of Haroun of Darfour. On June 18th he reaches Toashia, having travelled along a desert track where "the number of skulls along the road is appalling." They are all the skulls of slaves. The sufferings of the wretched gangs are worse than ever they were. "Why should

I at every mile be stared at by the grinning skulls of those who are at rest?" he asks. In three days he has captured four hundred slaves, but they are only a drop in the ocean of the traffic. If he remains at the wells the gangs in charge of the slave-traders are taken away to avoid him into a waterless desert, where they die in terrible agony. Between Dara and Toashia, eighty miles, thirty wretched creatures have died out of one hundred and fifty. "It is enough to cause despair." At last, on June 25th, after meeting Gessi and hearing all details of the recent campaign in the Bahr Gazelle, Gordon turns off for Khartoum and Cairo. His last act in this weary land was in keeping with the hopeless toil he had been so long engaged in. "I have ordered the skulls which lay about here (Toashia) in great numbers to be piled in a heap, as a memento to the natives of what the slave-dealers have done to their people."

The beginning of the end has now come. On July 1st a telegram reaches Gordon at Fogia announcing that Ismail Pacha has been deposed, and that Tewfik reigns in his stead. On the 21st Khartoum is reached, and a month later Gordon is in Cairo. His mind is now made up; he has brought his resignation with him. Ismail's dismissal has decided matters.

Loyalty with Gordon was not a thing to be transferred at the bidding of an intrigue. "It pains me what sufferings my poor Khedive Ismail has had to go through," are the last words he writes before quitting Khartoum. Again there is a special train and a palace placed at his disposal. He refuses the first, and only accepts the last

so as not openly to mark disapproval of the new *régime;* but his nature is not one to refuse help to any one. There is an invasion threatening from Abyssinia, and he tells the new Khedive he is ready to start at once for Massowah and make a final attempt to settle matters with King Johannes; he will then go home. Of course, there is the usual cabal against him in Cairo, and for once Pachas, Debt-Commissioners, and foreign consuls feel friendly to each other in the presence of this outspoken honest soldier.

Arrived at Massowah he soon finds that negotiations from a distance are useless; he must cross the frontier and go to Ras Aloula's camp, on the lofty table-land of Abyssinia. At least this arrangement has the advantage of changing the scene of negotiations from the sweltering sea-coast to the top of the lofty blue line of mountains where the clouds are beginning to break after the summer rains.

After five days' toilsome climbing, the little caravan, now mounted on mules, reaches Gura, the spot where, three years earlier, the Egyptian army had been cut to pieces. Here, on the "top of the steepest of hills," Ras Aloula, the frontier chief, held his court. Gordon is in the gorgeous Field-Marshal's uniform, which he has donned in the open, amid a downpour of rain, but Ras Aloula has a pretty accurate idea of how matters are going in Egypt, and he receives his visitor with studied discourtesy After three days of fruitless interview the envoy agrees to continue his journey farther on. In reality it is twenty-four days' journey. He is taken by the worst road in this country of terrible pathways; up mountain sides and down into the depths of river valleys,

past "Ambás," the natural fortress-prisons of Abyssinia, where, on a dizzy table-mountain top, the king's state prisoners are kept, communication between summit and low country being only possible by means of rope, basket, and pulley hauled from above.

On October 12th he receives on his road letters from Gessi announcing the death of Sulieman Rahama and ten other confederate leaders in the Bahr Gazelle, shot after they had surrendered themselves as prisoners. "I have no compunction about his (Sulieman's) death," Gordon writes. "I told him that if he fought the Government God would slay him. Gessi only obeyed my orders in shooting him." Alas! it was not so; he had compunction about the death of this young chief, and he carried that compunction with him to the grave. Five years later his repeated applications that Zebehr Pacha might be sent from Cairo to Khartoum and reinstated in all his honours and emoluments, had its deepest root in the "compunction" which he here persuades himself he does not feel. We do not mean to assert that the life of this young man, Sulieman Rahama, was not legally forfeited by his revolt against Egypt; that is quite another matter. There are men who cannot afford to play the part of the ordinary soldier, and Gordon was one of these men. The life of Major André was more justly forfeited than was Sulieman Rahama's, but nevertheless Washington did wrong to take it. The Duc d'Enghien was plotting treason against the Government of France, and was in active correspondence with the men who had made a desperate attempt upon the life of the French ruler, and were preparing to make another attempt, but Napoleon was wrong to let him be shot. It is not in the ears of

Wellington alone that the world thunders "Ney" when the victor would sully his victory by setting up the scaffold on the field of battle.

At last the long rugged journey draws to an end; the track has crossed all the tributaries on the right bank of the Tacazzé River, and at each river-course the path dips down one thousand feet on one side and mounts up the same height on the other. Gordon has been taken along this rugged roadway to show him the hopelessness of invading Abyssinia.

The meeting of Gordon with the "king of kings" was a strange one. It took place at dawn. Johannes demanded the retrocession of the lands Egypt had taken from Abyssinia within the last ten years. "I could also claim," he said, "Dongola, Berber, Nubia, and Sennaar, but I will not do so." Memory lives long in these mountain lands. Seven centuries had passed since those provinces of old Ethiopia had been reft from this once great Empire of Abyssinia. On November 8th the king again received the envoy; nothing came of these interviews. Gordon was instructed not to cede Bogos. The king would give no promise not to endeavour to recover his lost possessions by force of arms. He would send a letter to the Khedive, that was all. Gordon was glad to get away even with this trifling result of his mission. At the first halting-place on his return road he opened the letter and read as follows: "To Mahommed Tewfik.—I have received the letters you sent me by that man. I will not make a secret peace with you. If you want peace, ask the sultans of Europe."

That was all. Gordon continued his way, and reached Char-Amba, the gate of Abyssinia, on November 14th.

Here he halted his little caravan. Below, to the north-west, lay a wonderful panorama. Clear of cloud or speck of mist, the great plains of the Soudan, the vast level region through which the Blue Nile winds on its way to Khartoum, lay outspread to a horizon which sight could not reach. As Gordon sat looking at this splendid vision of the land over which he had so long ruled, a wild troop of mountain horsemen swooped down upon his camp. Their leader carried a letter bearing the king's seal. No personal violence was offered, but Gordon and his party were prisoners; they must return, and take the road to Massowah instead of the one they were following direct to Kassala. There was nothing to be done but to obey. From a village on the backward road Gordon managed to despatch telegrams to the Khedive by way of Galabat. In these he urged that a war-steamer with troops and two guns should be sent to Massowah. Then turning to the east at Gondar he began the long route to Massowah. From November 18th to December 8th the march was carried out under great difficulties. Although nominally free after the second day from Gondar, the party was subjected to a great deal of rough usage. The winter season had now begun, and the mountains were covered with snow. A second time Gordon was arrested near the frontier. "Sleeping with an Abyssinian at the foot and one on each side of you is not comfortable," he writes; "and so I passed my last night in Abyssinia." The next day he reached Massowah. So ended a strange experience of this mountain land and its wild people.

Notwithstanding all he had suffered at their hands Gordon read them with an unbiassed judgment. "You

have far abler men to deal with than I had anticipated," he wrote; "men of stern, simple habits, and utter freedom from bombast, or ordinary uncivilised tinsel and show. It is a race of warriors, hardy, and though utterly undisciplined, religious fanatics." Something like that old Highland stock from which this man had himself derived his own grand qualities. With that extraordinary elasticity of mind which brought Gordon quickly up from whatever depth of trouble or disaster fortune sent him, he sums up his impressions and experiences of Abyssinia as soon as he arrives at Massowah with still the same deep insight into human nature, the same quaint comparisons. "He (the king) is of the strictest sect of the Pharisees. He talks like the Old Testament; drunk overnight, he is up at dawn reading the Psalms. If he were in England he would never miss a prayer-meeting, and would have a Bible as big as a portmanteau."

And here the curtain falls upon the last chapter but one in the career of Charles Gordon in the Soudan. From Massowah he went to Cairo. Despite all his toil and suffering in the service of Egypt, his reception at the capital was worse than the mere negative coldness of official displeasure. It is only true to say that every man's hand was against him, the hardest blows coming from his own countrymen. His cipher telegrams to the Khedive he was soon to read in the London papers, with his proposals clipped and changed to suit the objects of the men who were now in power in Cairo. Quick as steam and electricity could carry the warped messages, they were sent to demonstrate to England that this great son of hers was not only inconsistent, disobedient,

and insubordinate, but that he was also mad! Well, it is all past now, and Time, the great avenger, has set everything in its place. Khedives and Pachas, consuls and commissioners, Ministers and journalists, big and little, have sunk away into oblivion; and, looking across the dead level of the world which has taken them to their rest, or in which they still await the great effacement, we see, beyond and above all, a mountain-top lying in lustrous afterglow, the light that comes when the sun has set, to carry the memory of a very noble life far into the night of Time.

CHAPTER VII

INDIA—CHINA—IRELAND—MAURITIUS—THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE—PALESTINE

HOME and rest. How often in far-off scenes of strife and misery, worn with prolonged exertion under a terrible sun, and spent with the weariness that comes from physical and mental suffering endured upon a road that seemed endless in its length, had Gordon pictured to himself a day when he would go home and rest! Well, now he had come home; but the rest, where was it? The time was the midwinter of 1880. A strange fit of hero-worship was still passing across the English people. A campaign against the South African tribe known as Zulus had just been brought to a successful termination. Some two regiments of British cavalry, fourteen battalions of regular infantry, four batteries of artillery, and a strong auxiliary force of irregular troops had marched from our frontier across sixty or seventy miles of well-watered, open, grass country, and the larger division of this force having repulsed in square the attack of a body of natives chiefly armed with spears, had burned the *kraal* or grass village of the Zulu king, and then retired within our frontiers.

It is difficult now to realise the extraordinary enthu-

siasm which this very facile feat of arms called forth from an admiring nation. There were presentations of swords of honour, subscriptions, civic banquets and illuminated addresses from mayors and corporate bodies. Old veterans, who still remembered the traditions of the great French war, could not help indulging sarcastic comment as they contrasted the landing of the regiments that had won Waterloo with these effusive demonstrations.

Meanwhile the real African hero, the man who for six years had by his great genius maintained the authority of a weak State over a region as large as Europe and among races whose bravery and power in war we were soon to test to our cost; the man who, sweeping like a whirlwind across immense deserts, had seemingly multiplied his individuality into legions of soldiers; this man whom, it is possible, the future will look upon as the hero of our time and race, was now an unnoticed stranger, dwelling as a bird of passage on our shores. "I like Nelson's signal," he had once written while in the Soudan. "England expects duty; now the race is for honours, not honour, and for newspaper praise." It is probable that as time goes on there will arise an entirely false conception, not of the man himself, because he has left in his writings a vast mass of thought through which it will not be easy for the world to lose its way, but it is more than possible that the contemporary view of Gordon and the treatment which he was accorded by the governing powers of his time will altogether change its aspect. There is a picture of Shakespeare painted in our day which represents him seated in the centre of an admiring circle of the great ones of his

age, who, in the neatest fitting trunk-hose and doublets, are hanging upon the poet's words with an expression of the profoundest interest. We know the truth about Shakespeare and his times better than that, but the truth of Gordon and his times is not so likely to be clear to our children's children. The men who write for the public of the moment are quite as ready to hide with a broad varnish of adulation the people's hero, whom a year or two ago they were equally ready to ignore or to condemn before popularity or fashion had set its approving seal upon him. All the official minutes of disapproval, the inspired paragraphs of newspapers, the sneers of society, will have floated off into the dead sea of a forgotten past; but in the inevitable reaction of opinion, after long neglect, there is the other danger that the real man will become almost as over-idealised a favourite as before he had been an underestimated reality. Men like to think of their hero beloved and honoured during the brief span of his life on earth; they are apt to forget that the very singleness of purpose which made his name appear so wonderful after death, and was the real secret of the success they so much admire, was also the cause of isolation in life and of opposition to fellow-men, which must ever be two of the most potent factors against popularity. "The praise and blame of the world are equally indifferent to me," he had often said, "you may write of me as if I were dead." The contemporary world does not like to be told this, however much its children and grandchildren may admire it later on, and the contemporary world has many methods of showing its dislike. Gordon's presence in Egypt had been a reproach

to a wide class of foreign officials, who regarded that country as a good place for doing English work in and drawing Egyptian money out of. Neither was his presence in England a comfortable thing. A nation which is in the earlier stages of a transition state from oligarchic monopoly of place and power to democratic unexclusiveness can scarcely accept with pleasure, at least in some quarters, the man who knows as much as Gordon knew, who thinks as much as Gordon thought, and who has a disagreeable habit of laying his finger upon some Egyptian, Indian, or Irish sore, and saying out without fear, favour, or affection the opinion that is in his head. Clearly the Mauritius, the Cape of Good Hope, or Van Diemen's Land must need the immediate services of such persons.

Three months after Gordon returned from the Soudan the lease of power which the Conservative party had enjoyed for six years came to a close. Whether it was that the people of England had begun to see war in South Africa, war on the Indian frontier, and a policy of activity, masterly or mischievous, as its partisans or opponents might elect to call it, had a reverse side to its medals, or whether they thought that the simple rule of turn about being fair play was sound in politics, is needless now to inquire; but the change of Government that occurred in April 1880 was of much moment in the life of Gordon.

The early months of 1880 were of unusual severity. Gordon had been enjoined to take rest, to retire, in fact, for several months of complete quiet. He would seek this necessary repose, he thought, in the Swiss mountains, where the blue of Leman's Lake and the

snow of the hills of Savoy would cool the eyes and rest the brain that had so long been seared with the fierce sun and blinding sands of the Soudan. At Lausanne a few weeks passed quietly away, but March brought a telegram offering the command of the Colonial forces at the Cape of Good Hope to the ex-Governor of the Soudan. The Cape Government had at this time determined upon the disarmament of the Basuto nation, and it was pretty well understood that behind that order lay war with this mountain people. Time had not yet taught us wisdom in South Africa, and the annexation of the Transvaal, still unpaid for, was regarded as the keynote of our true Colonial policy.

Gordon declined the proffered command. His views were opposed to those of the men who then guided the ship of State in the troubled seas of South Africa.

The accession of the Liberals to office brought about an immediate change in the government of India. Lord Lytton was recalled and Lord Ripon appointed Governor-General. Gordon was offered the post of Private Secretary to the new Viceroy, and "in a moment of weakness," as he himself terms it, he accepted the post. Scarcely had he done so than he repented his act.[1] He saw at once that all the long war he had waged with official intolerance in Egypt would have been but child's play to the hostility of the men who would be his enemies in his new sphere. "My views were

[1] "Off Aden, 22.5.80.—I have been an idiot, and took this place with Lord Ripon, who is a kind and considerate master; but I hate India, and how I ever could have taken the post is past my comprehension. The endless sort of quarrels which seem to be going on there by all accounts is enough to sicken one. I shall get out of it as soon as I can."

diametrically opposed to those of the official classes, and in the face of the vested interests in India I could not hope to do anything really to the purpose." Nevertheless he felt bound to go out to India with the new Governor-General. He had never been in our great Eastern dependency, and perhaps on the spot the outlook might not appear so hopeless. The sequel is so recent and so well known that it is really needless to dwell upon it. Three days after his arrival in Bombay Gordon resigned his appointment. His reasons for doing so are even now the subject of controversy among many men. In reality there is nothing more simple. The whole nature of the man, the entire tenor of his previous life, every spoken word and written thought of his long career were so many protests against the supposition that he could have suited himself to the work he was now to be engaged in. Perhaps if there was a Governor-General of India with whom he could have found himself in thorough unison in feeling and acquiescence in policy, that man would have been found in the deviser and supporter of the famous Ilbert Bill; but the differences between the views of Gordon and the permanent official world in which his life would be cast in India were too vast to be bridged by similarity of sentiment with any one man, no matter how great might be that man's position.

There is a tradition among the Turks that the first chief of their race who led a troop of wild horsemen into Asia Minor came in sight, from a gorge in the Karamanian hills, of a plain beneath, upon which two rival tribes were contending for victory. The sight of battle was dear to the Toorkman, but he reined in his

charger long enough to see which side was the weaker —who were the losers. That was enough for him; he asked no other explanation of the quarrel, but charging the stronger enemy he overthrew it. Gordon had a similar nature. He would no more have joined with the official view of India and its people than he could join with the foreign element in Cairo against the people of Egypt. "When oil mixes with water, we will mix together," he had written a short time earlier of one of the most successful Indian officials of our time. Gordon was not content to take the accepted reasons of things. He looked below the surface. The men who make real history know best of all the worthless nature of the thing we call current history. To tell him that debt and famine and war were the natural results of India under a really wise and just system of government was not to convince him that it was true. He had a fatal tendency to go to the root of matters, and to ask himself, for instance, if debt and famine and war were the natural consequences of life in India, had not the fact of millions sterling in the shape of pay for English employees, pensions, cost of foreign troops, of unprofitable stores, etc., annually taken out of the country, something to say to this triple conglomerate of misery. It was only a year before this date, 1880, that a military officer of high rank and deep insight into Indian affairs had said "that there never could be another rebellion in India, because the people were too weak from want of food to fight." That one fact would have sufficed for Gordon. State-craft, official tradition, the policy of predecessors, all would have gone down before the simple reality of the first village he came to being in want of bread, while

the vessels at the nearest port were shipping wheat to England or sending rice to China. It was as necessary for him to be on the side of the weak as it is necessary for water to flow down or fire to burn up; and to be on the side of the weak, however glowing and brilliant and easy it may seem in the pages of a novel or on the boards of a theatre, is in real life, and especially in official real life, the very hardest, most unromantic, unpatriotic, unfriendly, and generally unpleasant task that human existence can lay before its creatures. The French, with their fine sense of definition, have found various names for the men who have two sets of opinions, one for their inward consciences, the other for outward use in the political world. There are "solutionists," "opportunists," and so forth. "Men whose ideas are kept within the zone of practical politics" is the modern English definition of such persons. Gordon was neither a "solutionist" nor an "opportunist" nor a "practical politician," nor any other of the various degrees of time-serving officialism which is content to wait with its reform or denunciation of wrong until the ing of the balance has begun to drop towards the side t the weak, and they can carry their salaries and their iends along with their opinions over to the cause which is now become the strong as well as the right one.

Putting for a moment those reasons for resignation aside, and admitting that it was possible for Gordon to have continued as Private Secretary to the Viceroy, it was perhaps unfortunate that there should have been any meeting at Bombay between the incoming and the outgoing officials. They were at opposite poles of opinion. It would be too much to say that the out-

going *régime* had been one of blood and iron; the iron part of the performance was certainly not apparent, but the whole policy had been one of aggression hidden under specious declaration. It was a policy which ignored sentiments of abstract justice in dealing with Asiatic princes or people. If it was the policy of Clive without his open defiance of human right, it might also be added it was the policy of Clive without his genius.

Two days after the resignation of his office Gordon received a telegram from China asking him to proceed to Pekin. The position of China was critical: war with Russia was imminent. "Work, position, conditions can all be arranged to your satisfaction," said the message. Three days later he replied, accepting the invitation to China, but as for conditions he was "indifferent." Then he telegraphed to the English War Office asking for six months' leave. "Never mind pay," he added, "and fear not that I will involve our Government in war." For the next two or three days message and answer were passing over the wires. Leave could not be given until object and position were fully explained. Gordon replied that he was ignorant of these things, but would write fully from China. Then came a direct refusal. This was stretching the bow of authority beyond the breaking-point. He at once threw up his commission and, without waiting for further reply, turned his face to China. He was actually without funds, having come out to India as a Government passenger he had to defray the passage of his successor. He had now to borrow the money which would pay his passage from Bombay to China. The cost consequent upon his

acceptance of the official appointment had been considerable. The expensive, richly embroidered vice-regal coat had never even been worn. Never mind, he "will present it to Li Hung Chang," he writes, "when he arrives in China." Gordon had sailed from India without having heard from England the result of his last decision. In a few words he had said, "I must go to China. If you decline to give me leave of absence I wish to retire from the service; if you say I cannot retire by commutation of pension, then I resign my commission, and make you a present of its value" (about six thousand pounds). Before embarking for China he for the first time in his life sought to explain his motives in the columns of the Press. He had felt deeply the supposition that he was about to proceed to China as a soldier of fortune, intent only upon the personal advantage he might derive from war between China and Russia. "My object in going to China," he said, "is to persuade the Chinese not to go to war with Russia. . . . Whether I succeed in being heard or not is not in my hands. I protest, however, at being regarded as one who wishes for war in any country, still less in China. Inclined as I am, with only a small degree of admiration for military exploits, I esteem it a far greater honour to promote peace than to gain any paltry honours in a wretched war."[1]

In July 1880 Gordon reached China. He went at once to Tientsin, where his old friend and companion-in-arms, Li Hung Chang, held command. Li was for peace, but there was a powerful war-party in Pekin, and the question of peace or war hung in an evenly-poised balance.

[1] *Events in the Life of Charles George Gordon.*

From Tientsin Gordon proceeded to the Imperial capital. Sixteen years before he had never hesitated to speak his mind openly to the highest mandarins, and the time that had since passed over him had not changed his habit of truth. War with Russia in the present condition of China was not to be thought of: Pekin would be in possession of a Russian army within a few weeks of a declaration of hostilities. The war-party were obstinate: the dispute grew warm. Six years of the Soudan sun had not cooled the temper of the former captain of engineers. The high Ministers of the Tsungli-yamen, with Prince Chun at their head, heard many strange words, whose straightforward meaning not even a tactful interpreter could soften. At last there came a phrase that seemed impossible of repetition. "It would be sheer idiotcy to fight Russia," the interpreter would not repeat the word "idiotcy," but there was an Anglo-Chinese dictionary lying on the table, and Gordon, opening the book, pointed out the obnoxious equivalent to the astonished Ministers. It is probable that had such a word been used in the hearing of an European Council of Ministers there would have been a terrible explosion of official wrath, and the speaker would have been summarily dismissed. "Grieve not that men do not know you," had once said Confucius, "but grieve that you do not know men." The Tsungli-yamen had the merit, so rare among their kind, of knowing the man they were dealing with, and they not only listened to his words but followed his advice. The peace with Russia was not broken. Gordon went back to Li Hung Chang, wrote a long and very able treatise upon the proper method of warfare to be followed by the Chinese

in the event of an attack being made upon the Empire, and then left China. On his return journey he received a telegram from London informing him that his leave had been cancelled, and that his resignation was not accepted. A month later he replied from Aden, "You might have trusted me." "I cannot stand it" (this suspicion of his intentions), he wrote to a friend from the same place. Truly the measurement of a man is a long process in England. "The giant had to fall before I could measure him," had said Chateaubriand of the great Napoleon after St. Helena. Was it necessary that England should measure Gordon by the scaffold of Khartoum?

The winter of 1880 was beginning when Gordon reached England. Another season of scanty crops and dripping harvest had come to deepen the distress of the peasant in his last home—Ireland. Grouse and stags had long ago driven out the Scotch crofter: the "consolidation of farms" had even earlier destroyed the English cottier; but in Ireland the "march of civilisation," as the greed of landowners had been impiously called, had not yet cleared from the surface of the soil its best and truest product, the people. There, living on the narrow margin between rack-rent and starvation, the peasants still held on to their farms and households.

Two severe seasons and the narrow margin had disappeared: the landlords began to tighten their grasp upon the soil. *Coûte que coûte*, they must have, not their pound of flesh, but what was in reality the price of the flesh and blood of the entire family; for already the highest authority in the land had declared that the process of eviction was tantamount to a sentence of

death. Then began the old scenes: the "driver," the server, the bailiff, the policeman, were abroad, and behind them in gloomy procession came the antithesis of injustice—resistance. Against the driver appeared the blackened face, against the server rose the "moonlighter:" the notice to quit was followed by the threatening letter: Boycott and Bence Jones called forth Rory of the Hills and Captain Rock. The only wonderful thing about it all was that it should have been possible in the end of the nineteenth century. Gordon beheld this strange state of slavery and slave-driving almost at the door of his own home. He who had been fighting man's savage injustice to man afar off in Darfourian deserts all at once found that twelve hours' travel from him there was another species of this vile traffic going on. If he turned to the columns of the Press for explanation he met only abuse of the wretched slaves who dared to speak their hurt or resist their masters, but he knew too well the true value of the Press when human interest is concerned, and, as five-and-twenty years' experience of half the races on the earth had shown him there never was discontent among that most patient of all animals on earth, the man who tilled the surface-soil of the world, except where some great wrong was being perpetrated against him, he determined to go to Ireland, and, with the evidence of his own eyes and ears—those eyes and ears so keen to catch truth, so quick to hear the ring of right metal in the coinage of words—to judge of Ireland and her people.

During the month of November he travelled through the south and west of Ireland, watching and noting as

he went. He carried a gun, so as to have an excuse for penetrating the remote glens and mountains of those beautiful highlands of Kerry and of Connemara without exciting the suspicion that he was the friend or ally of either landlord or tenant. He was simply a sportsman seeking snipe. Thus journeying from town to town and village to village he was able in a comparatively short space of time to satisfy himself upon the much-vexed question of Ireland, and the conclusion that he arrived at bears all the more weight because it was not written in the interests of one political party or the other, but was the deliberate verdict of a man who had witnessed in his life more human suffering and more of varied human nature than any man then living. But that was not all. Had Gordon been only an ordinary-brained official, who had lived his life among the many races of our Empire, his opinion would have been eminently worthy of consideration; but he was something beyond all that. The man who wrote the letter which is here given in full was not only the keenest observer, but he was the bravest, the purest, and the most truthful Englishman of his time:—

"*December* 1*st*, 1880.

"MY DEAR ——, you are aware how interested I am in the welfare of this country, and, having known you for twenty-six years, I am sure I may say the same of you.

"I have lately been over the south-west of Ireland in the hope of discovering how some settlement could be made of the Irish question, which, like some fretting cancer, eats away our vitals as a nation.

"I have come to the conclusion that (1) a gulf of antipathy exists between the landlords and tenants of the north-west, west, and south of Ireland. It is a gulf which is not caused alone by the question of rent, and there is a complete lack of sympathy

between these two classes. It is useless to inquire how such a state of things has come to pass. I call your attention to the pamphlets, letters, and speeches of the landlord class as a proof of how little sympathy or kindness there exists among them for the tenantry; and I am sure that the tenantry feel in the same way towards the landlords.

"(2) No half-measured Acts which left the landlords with any say to the tenantry of these portions of Ireland will be of any use. They would be rendered, as past Land Acts have been, quite abortive, for the landlords will insert clauses to do away with their force. Any half-measures will only place the Government face to face with the people of Ireland as the champions of the landlord interest. The Government would be bound to enforce their decision, and with a result which none can foresee, but which certainly would be disastrous to the common weal.

"(3) My idea is that seeing, through this cause or that it is immaterial to examine, a deadlock has occurred between the present landlords and the tenants, the Government should purchase up the rights of the landlords over the whole or the greater part of Longford, Westmeath, Clare, Cork, Cavan, and Donegal. The yearly rental of these districts is some four millions. If the Government gave the landlords twenty years' purchase, it would cost £80,000,000, which, at three and a half per cent, would give a yearly interest of £2,800,000, of which £2,500,000 could be recovered. The lands would be Crown Lands—they would be administered by a Land Commission, which would be supplemented by an Emigration Commission, which might for a short time need £100,000. This would not injure the landlords, and so far as it is an interference with proprietary right, it is as just as is the law which forces Lord A. to allow a railway through his park for the public benefit. I would restrain the landlords from any power or control in these Crown Land districts. Poor-law, roads, schools, etc. should be under the Land Commission.

"(4) For the rest of Ireland I would pass an Act allowing free sale of leases, fair rents, and a Government valuation.

"In conclusion, I must say from all accounts, and my own observation, that the state of our fellow-countrymen in the parts I have named is worse than that of any people in the

world, let alone Europe. I believe that these people are made as we are; that they are patient beyond belief; loyal, but at the same time broken-spirited and desperate, living on the verge of starvation in places in which we would not keep our cattle.

"The Bulgarians, Anatolians, Chinese, and Indians are better off than many of them are. The priests alone have any sympathy with their sufferings, and naturally alone have a hold over them. In these days, in common justice, if we endow a Protestant university why should we not endow a Catholic university in a Catholic country? Is it not as difficult to get a £5 note from a Protestant as from a Catholic or a Jew? Read the letters of ——, and tell me if you see in them a particle of kind feeling towards the tenantry, and if you have any doubts about this, investigate the manner in which the Relief Fund was administered, and in which the sums of money for the improvement of estates by landlords were expended. In 1833 England gave freedom to the West India slaves at a cost of £20,000,000—worth now £30,000,000. This money left the country. England got nothing for it. By an expenditure of £80,000,000 she may free her own people. She would have the hold over the land, and she would cure a cancer. I am not well off, but I would offer —— or his agent £1000 if either of them would live one week in one of these poor devil's places and feed as these people do.

"Our comic prints do an infinity of harm by their caricatures. Firstly, the caricatures are not true, for the crime in Ireland is not greater than that in England; and, secondly, they exasperate the people on both sides of the Channel, and they do no good. It is ill to laugh and scoff at a question which affects our existence.—Yours sincerely,

"C. G. GORDON."[1]

[1] Short as was this visit to Ireland, there is proof that the condition of the island and the welfare of its people held during the remainder of his life a foremost place in Gordon's mind. Writing from Jerusalem in 1883 he again reverts to the subject, and begs that a well-known Irish peer then on a diplomatic mission to Egypt might be asked if his (Gordon's) plan for solving the Irish land-question was not the only method of settlement.

There is no excuse necessary for the introduction in this book of every word of the above letter. The question of Ireland is still an open one. It still "affects our existence" as a nation. "The state of our fellow-countrymen in Ireland is worse than that of any people in the world, let alone Europe:" these were terrible words, coming from such an authority, coming from one whose knowledge of human misery was unquestionably greater than that of any living man, but they fell on ears that would not listen. It was said then, and it has been said since, that Gordon had not had time to fully understand the Irish question. Doubtless there were many Pachas in Egypt who said the same of his Soudan views, and many slave-holders and drivers and traders who spoke in a similar strain of his efforts against slavery; but had Gordon lived his life in Ireland he could not have more fully comprehended the vital cause that lay at the root of the misery of the land which another brilliant soldier, writing three hundred years earlier, had named "The commonwealth of common woe."

"The Irish question is a simple one," an Irish landlord had said to the writer of these pages about this very same date, 1880; "you have only to emigrate the people and get rid of the priests, and then all will be easy enough." "I have good news for you," another large landlord had remarked to a brother county magnate half a dozen years before, also in the hearing of the writer, "Blank (a well-known legal authority in Ireland) tells me you can drive a coach and six through any part of Gladstone's late Land Bill." Laughable in their selfish stupidity would be these words if they were not

terrible when one thinks of the wicked indifference to human suffering which they reveal.

When Gordon wrote his Irish letter one hundred years had passed away since Edmund Burke had been telling the people of England the truth about Ireland. But the voice and pen whose utterances had been so powerful in the cause of suffering humanity in India and in the Colonial Empire of Great Britain were unheeded when the injustice they denounced and the right they would invoke were Irish; and now, when another century had rolled by, when famine and the insurrection of a maddened people had built still higher the gloomy monument of misrule, the warning voice of this great soldier is raised in vain. He is listened to when he speaks in the cause of some distant race in Central Africa; he has legions of admiring readers when he points the road to right and justice for some nameless tribe in the remote Soudan; but he is ridiculed and told he knows nothing of his subject when he tells the people of England that within twelve hours of the capital there exists a deeper misery and a more unnatural injustice.

The year 1881 opened with ill omens at home and abroad. Coercion in Ireland was to precede any attempt to settle grievances. In South Africa the long-pent animosity of the Dutch Boers had suddenly broken into active revolt in the Transvaal, and repeated disasters to our arms were taking place. The penalty of the policy of activity beyond the frontier was being paid by those who had opposed the policy. Nemesis does not reckon as to the particular fly that happens to sit on the head of the nail when she drops her avenging hammer.

In April 1881 "Colonel Gordon, *tired of doing nothing*," telegraphs to the Government of the Cape of Good Hope that he is willing to go out to assist in terminating war and administrating Basutoland. The words in italics give his brother's reason for this step, and it is not unlikely that future generations will read them with wonder. Let us glance a moment at the state of our Empire in this year 1881, when this man was tired of doing nothing. The deep-seated malady of Ireland had reached a most acute stage. Annexation, against the wishes of the Dutch population, had produced a dangerous revolt in the Transvaal. Misgovernment and broken faith with the natives of Basutoland had brought on a costly Colonial war in that mountain region. In Afghanistan the people were still seething against an aggressive intervention which had done more to facilitate the advance of Russia towards our Indian frontier than twenty years of peace had done. In Egypt the steady sapping of the Khedive's authority, done nominally in the interest of the shareholders, was already producing a plentiful crop of *émeute* and intrigue; while in the now half-forgotten Soudan the Mahdi, still a dim item of disturbance in that distant region, had already raised his standard as the leader of a revolt of Islam.

Such in a few words was the state of the world of English interest at the moment when England had no employment to offer her best son.[1]

[1] There is reason for thinking that at this time—March 1881—efforts were being made to compel Gordon either to accept some insignificant routine appointment in England or make him retire from the army; for on April 4th in that year he thus writes to an old friend: "Now it would be trying to me to

The Cape Government did not even think it necessary to reply to Gordon's offer of service. A week or two later something turned up. An engineer friend was ordered to proceed to Mauritius in the ordinary routine of duty. He did not wish to go. It was a thankless office, with nothing really to be done, and having exile thrown in along with idleness. Would somebody take this death in life for him? Yes, on one condition Gordon would take it. There must be no payment of money to the substitute. That was not a stipulation which, in this age at least, is likely to cause much difficulty or delay. The exchange was soon arranged, and in May Gordon started for his distant charge, where for nearly a year he was employed, as he himself described it, in "looking after the barrack repairs, and seeing that the drains were in order."

At last this waste of a great life ceased.[1] Early in 1882 the new Cape Government suddenly bethought

go and look after ordinary Royal Engineer duties, so if you could aid me to anything in a very mild way at Cape, or elsewhere, with the mildest of salaries, or even with Lieutenant-Colonel R.E.'s pay, I would be much obliged." A day or two later he writes again to the same friend—the difficulty having, through the intervention of this friend, apparently been surmounted: "For myself (*in re* this forced employment in the obstructive circle of R.E.) duty was particularly vexatious, for I should certainly have come to dire loggerheads with my obstructive R.E. chiefs. I claim to sympathise with any who try to stem the effete administration of our rulers. What we want is a man who will steam-hammer all departments to the welfare of our army, and it is therefore I do not wish to be shunted out, for I believe that the time is near when there will be a cry for such a man, and it is then I would like to be active."

[1] "This Patmos of idleness," he called Mauritius in a letter written August 29th, 1881.

them of the man whose telegram their predecessors had not troubled themselves to reply to. Basutoland had proved too hard a nut for the Colonial forces to crack. A couple of millions had been uselessly squandered in attempting to conquer the mountain chiefs, and the burning of the ploughs which the missionaries had induced the natives to adopt appeared to be the principal result of this large expenditure. Manifestly the sooner this very disreputable business was brought to an end the better for all parties.

Would Gordon renew the offer he had made a year earlier? Yes, he would. On April 2d he received this invitation, and on the 4th he had sailed for Cape Town. A sailing-ship named after his old Highland home carried him. They are boisterous winds and huge shaggy waves that go roaring round the Cape of Storms and run up into the Madagascar seas, and for a month the *Scotia* beat her way against them, for May is the November of the Southern Ocean. At length the Cape was reached. It would take more space than can be given to track the questions that lay at the root of the trouble with the Basutos through the forty years of their history, but a few words may suffice to put the reader in possession of the main facts. The Basutos had voluntarily become British subjects many years ago, under express stipulations which guaranteed them all their rights and privileges. They had accepted British magistrates and paid a general hut-tax to defray the cost of justice and of police. As they increased in numbers, so had the tax become higher, until it produced a large surplus sum. This surplus was absorbed into the Cape treasury instead of being spent upon the im-

provement of the natives; but that was not sufficient to produce resistance. It happened about twenty years ago that diamonds were discovered in large quantities in South Africa. The Basutos flocked to the diamond-fields to labour in the pits. They worked for hire. It suited the owners of the fields to pay them in guns and ammunition. This payment in arms was sanctioned by the Cape Government. Thus the Basutos obtained large quantities of guns, rifles, powder, and ball. When this trade had been going on for more than a dozen years the Cape Government passed a Disarmament Act, and ordered the Basutos to surrender the weapons they had legally acquired by the hard labour of their industry. It was a piece of injustice that the people would not submit to. They simply refused to give up their arms. Then came war, begun recklessly by the Colonial Government attempting to carry out their unjust law. In this war the Colonial forces could make no way, and the expense of hostilities threatened to involve the Government in bankruptcy. Such was the state of matters when Gordon was called in. As usual he quickly saw the real cause of the trouble and as quickly spoke his mind about it. They must admit their wrong and then begin to do right. They must send to these people magistrates of unspotted reputation. Of course, the "vested interests" were at once in revolt. It was necessary to get rid of this just steward, as it had been necessary to get rid of him in Egypt and in Ireland. To do the Cape Ministry justice, they did not support the cabal against their new servant. It is the unavoidable result of party government that majorities have to be thought of more than right or justice; but at last the

opposition reached a culminating point. Three out of the four Basuto chiefs had agreed to terms; the fourth, Masupha, still refused to accept magistrates and levy a hut-tax. Gordon felt certain that if he could personally interview this chief he, too, would accept the terms now offered. For this purpose he starts for Masupha's stronghold. It had been agreed between him and the head magistrate that no overt act of hostility was to be made against Masupha until Gordon had first tried his hand at personal negotiation. After that had failed, pressure might be applied. But no sooner had Gordon reached the Basuto chieftain's stronghold, and while he was yet negotiating with him, than news arrived that a hostile expedition was approaching. If Masupha Moshesh did not make the envoy pay with his life for this breach of all the rules of fair fighting, it was assuredly not because the men who were at the bottom of this movement had taken steps to prevent such a calamity.

After this it was not possible to continue in the service of the Cape Government. Gordon resigned his post as commandant-general, and embarking for England arrived home early in the month of November 1882.

It seemed to be the fate of this man that his life should be spent in a series of researches into the condition of the outside races of our Empire, and that each time when he returned to his native land full freighted with a fresh load of gathered experience, he was to be allowed to drift off into absolute inaction or into the service of a foreign State. It would be a curious study to compare the receptions given to Gordon on his return by the men who were at the head of the Foreign and Colonial

Offices at this time with the manner in which a continental king greeted him. "I now again request you, as you are at liberty, to enter my service," wrote the King of the Belgians. "For the moment I have no mission to offer you, but I wish much to have you at my disposal, and to take you from this moment as my counsellor. You can name your own terms. You know the consideration that I have for your great qualities."

Nor was neglect on the part of the English official world a thing very much to be wondered at in this case. Few men in our day had greater respect for principles, and less respect for mere persons, than Gordon. That bugbear of modern English life—a large majority—had no terrors for him. Indeed, he held the strength of such things to be much what Horace Walpole thought of them —"the bravery of a mob ducking a pickpocket"; and the sight of a poor Arab kneeling in the desert, turned towards Mecca in prayer, was a thing eminently more worthy of respect in his eyes than the spectacle of an entire Cabinet of English Ministers eating dinner at the Mansion-House.

Meanwhile there was an ardent wish which he had never been able to gratify. It was to visit the Holy Land. Few pilgrims over the earth had ever dwelt so much in spirit in that wonderful country. Now there had come an interval in this busy life. He would employ it by going over the ground and visiting the scenes he had so often seen in imagination amid the drip of tropical forest, or when the "lone and level sands" of the desert had stretched around his bivouac.

There is no more marked trait in Gordon's character

than the power he possessed of throwing himself heart and soul, body and mind, into his subject. Whatever it is, be it the most opposite work at the opposite ends of the earth, he attacks it with extraordinary energy. In the Crimea, when almost a boy, he sees where the vital error has been committed long before it has been caught by older heads. In China he strikes at the heart of the Taiping rebellion. At Gravesend he does not trouble himself with attending Social Science discussions, or writing magazine-articles on the state of the poor, but he hits out right and left at all the poverty and ignorance his arms can reach around him. In the Soudan he sees that slavery lies at the root of all the suffering. In Ireland he shows in a couple of pages more real insight into the causes of misery and discontent than can be gathered out of all the Blue Books and Royal Commissions of half a century. In the Cape he lays bare the real reasons of the native wars, and points out how they can be avoided. And now, in the Holy Land, he turns every faculty of his mind towards the examination of the great facts of man's creation, fall, and redemption; the everlasting struggle of life amid the rival forces of good and evil, and the profound mysteries of death and immortality.

It is curious to trace through his *Reflections in Palestine* the nature of the man coming out at every page. It is no theologian who is writing, no schoolman, no student deeply read in Eastern language, but a soldier of faith who has a thousand times in his wonderful life felt the living reality of the thing he is writing about, who for long years was never able to enter a church built by the hands of man, but who made of the whole world of his

life a vast cathedral in which prayer and good work and sacrifice and praise were ever going on—going on when his Chinese soldiers wavered in the breach, when the hostile natives closed around his scanty escorts in Unyoro, when the long horizons of the deserts of Kordofan shifted before the interminable "cushioned footfall of his camel." And now he was come to the scene which was the source and centre of it all. No wonder he shuts himself up within himself. "I see no one; my books are enough companionship," he says. Again and again he reads the Great History; takes it out with him to the hills, the pools, the gardens, the rocks; climbs the steep worn pathways, traces out the possible circuit of the old walls, rebuilds the towers, the gates, the temples; seeks the place of the Crucifixion, notes the rocks, the unchangeable outlines of the hills and the lights of sunrise and shades of twilight that know nothing of time's variety. Never before in his life had Gordon spent such a period of unbroken quiet as during this year 1883 in Palestine. It seemed that this long time of contemplation was given to him as a fitting reward for the weary years of strife in which he had worn, as he called it, "the greatcoat" of faith, and that here, at the final scene in the life of the Redeemer, whose teachings he had studied and practised, whose example he had tried to follow, whose name he had worshipped during thirty years of life, he was to prepare himself for the final approach of his own great travail now so close at hand.

Often as faith has been spoken of as the mainspring of Gordon's mind, no definition of that faith has been given in these pages. There were many men who spoke of his belief as being a strange mixture of

mysticism and measurement. "He was not content," a critic who knew nothing of the real man once said, "if he could not give the exact height and breadth of the Deity." Gordon's nature was a curious mixture of the spiritual and the matter-of-fact. Whatever he saw, or thought, or felt, or heard, he liked to set down on paper. The spiritual mystic and the sapper-measurer met in his mind, and just as his last journals contained diagrams showing the exact spot in the Nile where his steamer had been sunk by the Arab fire, and sketches illustrating the opinions or peculiarities of his opponents, so he was ever ready to set down in words, or figures, or diagrams every fact of that history which was to him the one cherished study of his life. The site of the garden of Eden, the spot where the ark first touched ground, the place of the altar of burnt-offering, the Temple of Jerusalem, the verification of the walls and the gates of the Holy City, were subjects of the deepest study to him. His busy mind was never tired of rebuilding out of the ruins of Arab, Greek, and Roman times the earlier edifices of long-vanished Jewish days. But all this was only the pastime of the man's faith, and he who would imagine from this pastime that Gordon was intent upon grasping in his mind the outward form of God, could indeed know little of the deep ocean of trust and faith that lay beneath.

In the vast reality of belief that was in him, he did not trouble himself with the labour of what is called reconciling faith and science. Nor did he ever enter into the polemical disputes between differing forms of religion. As for faith and science, he knew too well the exact value of the latter word ever to trouble his

mind with its "reconciliation." The fact that science could make a wire which was able to transmit thought with the rapidity of lightning could not obscure from him that other fact that, so far at least, this lightning thought-conductor had been used more to disseminate lies and foster gambling in stocks or horses than to spread truth or increase the store of human knowledge; and he knew, too, that while science might cast a cannon big enough or make a powder strong enough to knock down or blow up an entire nation, it was as powerless to make a grain of wheat as it was to produce a Charles Gordon. Neither did he enter into the disputes of creeds. Bigotry, that common weakness of even great minds, he was absolutely devoid of. What was the particular creed to which he belonged may well even be matter of dispute.

While in Jerusalem in 1883 he frequently received the Sacrament of Holy Communion in the Greek Church. A year later, on his last journey to Khartoum, he meets the Roman Catholic Bishop, Monseigneur Sogaro, and says to him, "Do not forget me in your prayers." A few days afterwards, writing from Korosko, he uses these words: "I shall have no eating (Holy Communion) in the Soudan. The Roman Catholic priests have all left (Khartoum), and are at Assouan." In the scant baggage which he is to get together when leaving England, he will bring only a few books, but among them will be Cardinal Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*, which, curiously enough, is to be the sole possession destined to come out from the great catastrophe, and to come out too, bearing in its worn pages many evidences of the deep, pure, humble faith of the man whose hand had

traced in marginal note and interlineation the tokens of his admiration.

Underneath the following lines in this little book deep pencil marks are drawn :—

"Now that the hour is come my fear is fled."
"Pray for me, oh my friends!"
"'Tis death, oh loving friends, your prayers, 'tis he."
"So pray for me, my friends, who have not strength to pray!"
"Use well the interval!"
"Prepare to meet thy God!"

Gordon gave this book to Mr. Frank Power, after his arrival in Khartoum, underlining these last lines, which now, read in the mournful light of the fate of the *Abbas* at Hebbeh, have a strange significance :—

"Farewell, but not for ever, brother dear."
"Be brave and patient on thy bed of sorrow."

"A man in close communion with God," the greatest English statesman of his day, speaking to our most celebrated soldier, had defined Gordon. Perhaps this definition explains a good deal of the power exercised by Charles Gordon over the masses of the world, and a great deal also of the antagonism that existed between him and those who are called "Men of the World."

Out in the wild spaces of the earth he had long ago realised the immense secret which the wonderful mind of Pascal had evolved from profound inquiry. "If there were no darkness," had said the great Frenchman, "man would not feel his corruption; if there were no light, man would have no hope of salvation. Thus it is not only quite right but necessary that God should be concealed in part and revealed in part, since it is

equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own misery, and to know his own misery without knowing God." Never had the necessity of this dual knowledge of God and man, of majesty and misery, of light and shade, of good and evil, been better understood than it was by Gordon. He had caught more than a glimpse of the real truth that lies beneath the modern craze of evolution, as often in the desert is found, deep beneath some nauseous or poisonous gourd which grows on the sand, a root leading to where, far down under the arid surface, lies a hidden spring of pure, clear water. The thoughts which came to Gordon in Palestine, written though they are in disconnected form and without any subsequent attempt to revise or classify them, are most unmistakable evidences that the true evolution, the evolution of good through faith, was fully understood by him. He sees that this enormous process, carried on from the first fall to this day, has had human faith as the central point of its system. A repetition, he calls it, of four great facts ever recurring—a state of darkness, a light breaking through the darkness, a division of light from darkness, a culmination or gathering up of light, and a casting back into chaos of the darkness—and the repetition is always made on some higher level of good, some broader horizon from which the light is to break upon the human soul. Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Job, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zachariah—through all the long procession of leaders, shepherds, rulers, kings, and prophets the central point of the vast revelation is Faith. Dim at first, much mixed up with human longing, and sometimes with human weakness, but still kept clear and visible even in these, is this central fact; until at last the old

dispensation passes, and to the lesson of Faith is added the equal lesson of Love. And from these twin fountains of light, Faith and Love, which have their united source springing out of the Rock of Calvary, flows forth the stream which is at last to wash away the darkness of the world.

CHAPTER VIII

KHARTOUM

FOUR years had passed away since that evening in November 1879 when Gordon looked his last upon the great plains of the Soudan, as they lay like a mighty map unrolled beneath his standpoint at Char-Amba in the Abyssinian mountains. All the long-gathering forces whose approach he had so often watched in the preceding years had since broken upon Egypt. The expression of the national wishes had been sternly suppressed; the bombardment of Alexandria by the English fleet had been followed by the invasion of Egypt by the British army, the attack on the lines of Tel-el-Kebir, and the break up of the Egyptian forces. In two months from the date of the first shot at Alexandria all resistance was at an end in the Delta. But the Soudan, that vast region of unrest, had still to be reckoned with. A rebellion, which began at the Island of Abba in 1881, had gradually spread over seven-eighths of the immense region. A new spirit seemed to have entered these hitherto despised tribes. Two things had in truth come to them—a leader to give unity to their efforts, and a knowledge that they were in every way better men and braver soldiers than the race which had so long ill-treated

them. The leader who in this interval had arisen to give point and purpose to the hitherto chaotic discontent of the Mohammedan Soudan was no ordinary man. Born of lowly parents in Dongola, Mahomet Achmet, the Nubian carpenter's son, had gradually succeeded in uniting the long separated nations of the Middle Nile into one powerful confederation, whose objects were the expulsion of the Turk and the cleansing of the creed of Islam from the corruptions of Ottoman ascendency. To his friends he was a genius, a guide, a Mahdi; to his enemies an impostor, a villain, a fanatic; to history he will be a man who proved his possession of great genius by the creation of empire out of nothing, and by the triumph of his revolt of Islam over the highly disciplined efforts of the most powerful of European nations. But the Soudan was a region lying so remote from the world of what is called practical politics that it might be safely left to stew in its own juice. So at least thought many persons, whose knowledge of the outside world and of the forces that move it would not be less accurate if they were a little more secure on their several seats of office. Those who ride solely by balance instead of by grip of leg have little inclination for studying the features of the country or the habits of the people through which their horses are carrying them. "How dare you speak suddenly to a man on horseback, sir!" once remarked a general to a young staff-officer who had cantered gaily up with outstretched hand, offering a sandwich-case to the distinguished but uncomfortable equestrian, whose balance had almost deserted him under the ordeal of sudden remark. So the Soudan stewed steadily on during the years 1882-83 until, in

the end of the latter year, there came a thunder-clap which all at once brought it painfully close at hand to us. The Egyptian army with which Arabi Pacha had endeavoured to fight us in 1882 had been collected in driblets after the defeat at Tel-el-Kebir, marched in irons to the great depôt of the Barrage, and then sent to the Soudan. About half-a-dozen Englishmen, mostly retired officers, managed to get appointed to this force. In September 1883 a march from Khartoum towards Kordofan had begun. Two months later the entire force, numbering ten thousand men, twenty guns, five hundred horses, five thousand camels, was annihilated by the wild clansmen of Kordofan whom Mahomet Achmet, the Mahdi, had gathered round his standard. So complete was the slaughter that for many weeks no detail of the disaster was known. It lay, and still lies, shrouded in the silence of a total extinction. Although there were only ten Englishmen in ten thousand Egyptians, the defeat at Kazghil was a severe blow to our *prestige;* and it was easy to see that even in Egypt, so hateful had our presence become to the people of the Delta, the news of the loss of their army in the Soudan was a subject of ill-concealed satisfaction since it embraced the foreigner in its catastrophe. The English Government were now alarmed. One of two things must happen—either the Soudan must be fought for with English troops and paid for with English gold, or it must be abandoned. The latter course was resolved upon, and was rightly resolved upon, but the time was unsuited for the evacuation. Had it been done while the army of Hicks Pacha had existed in the flesh to act as a covering force for the withdrawal of the garrisons from the Equator, Sennaar,

and Khartoum, all would have been well; but evacuation in the face of a triumphant Mahdi and his hosts flushed with victory, armed and equipped with the plunder of numerous vanquished armies, and confident that they were now the chosen soldiers of God, was an absolutely impossible operation.

It was at this moment of defeat and proposed evacuation that the English Government determined to call to its aid the one man who, in the wide Empire of England, had this Soudan at the ends of his fingers. Too late, indeed, they called him in; but if history would be just it must acquit the actual Ministers of the Crown of the negligence or the design of Gordon's exclusion. The men who had during many years kept at arm's length from the councils of the Empire the one man whose counsel might have enabled the men at the helm to steer the ship of State safely through the quicksands of Egyptian politics, were not the governors themselves. It must manifestly be the interest of the highest governing officials that the best and clearest knowledge should be given to them by their servants. A highly-centralised system of government administering the affairs of an immense scattered Empire can only be saved from inevitable ruin by the possession of the very best advice. All the adjuncts of steam and electricity only make the disaster of excessive centralisation more certain if the information sent from the circumference to the centre is not the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

It is not necessary that the world should know now who are responsible for the fact, the most extraordinary in all the career of Gordon, namely that when, at the eleventh

hour of disaster in Egypt, he was sent for to endeavour to set right the mass of ruin wrought by the mischievous advice of the men he had so long opposed, he was almost an unknown man to the English people. When the world awakes to the knowledge of a great soul living in its midst it is often slow to admit that it has ever gone to sleep, but of the fact of ignorance or carelessness regarding its knowledge of Charles George Gordon there can be no doubt. "At the moment of his departure for Khartoum," says his brother, "he was to the great mass of his countrymen a person who was now heard of for the first time." That this statement is not one prompted by a brother's too tightly-drawn criticism upon the neglect shown by the English official world to his illustrious relative will be clear enough from the following anecdote, the truth of which the writer of these pages can vouch for. When Gordon's departure on his last dangerous mission to the Soudan had made him at once the centre of comment in the Press, a gentleman in Pembrokeshire remarked to a field-officer of the garrison at Pembroke Dock, "I see the Government have just sent a Chinaman to the Soudan. What can they mean by sending a native of that country to such a place?" Impossible though this may seem, it was said in all gravity of mind and honest Conservative distrust of body of anything a Liberal Government could attempt; and the man who in 1884 believed that "Chinese" Gordon was a native of China, wearing a pigtail and the rest of it, was not a mere cipher in his native place, some rustic politician who was wont to get his inspiration of foreign affairs over local pipe and ale, but he was a magistrate and deputy-lieutenant of his county,

and in every way a worthy pillar of the State on the lines dear to the English mind.

It was on November 20th, 1883, that the news of the Mahdi's victory over the army commanded by Al-ed-Deen Pacha and General Hicks reached Cairo and London. For several weeks succeeding the arrival of the news there was panic in Cairo and confusion in the councils in London. It could not well have been otherwise. Never had the elements of chaos been better distributed, never had the possibility of vigorous and cool-headed action been more safely guarded against than they were at this moment in the division and arrangement of the governing power in Egypt. There were three armies in Cairo, three generals, three staffs, and naturally three ambitions. There were also two governing powers, each antagonistic to the other; one backed by the material authority of money and force, the other having behind it the vast influence of religion, nationality, and knowledge. Beyond and above all these rival powers and authorities there was the Government in London, with whom the final decision practically rested upon all Soudan and Egyptian questions. Blue Books are for many reasons not the most enlightening form of historical study: broadly looked at, they may be said to present to the reader the unmarked cards of the diplomatic pack; but the Blue Book, 1884, Egypt, is very interesting and very painful reading. We see in it a desire on the part of the English Government to send Gordon at once to the Soudan, when the news of Hicks Pacha's destruction had been received. We see this desire repeatedly put forward from home during the ensuing seven weeks, and as repeatedly declined by our

Minister in Cairo. Why? Who shall answer? If Gordon did not know at the time the reason of his services being so frequently declined when they could have been given with effect, before disaster multiplying upon disaster had rendered his task in the Soudan the most forlorn hope ever set before an officer, he knows it all now, and in due time we shall all know about it, too. Vague and indistinct as was the knowledge of the Soudan possessed by the English Executive, they certainly understood one solid course of action. It was clear that the case was a serious one; that the high doctors of professional diplomacy had sadly mistaken its symptoms, and that the sooner a real master was called in the better it would be. Thus they continued to urge upon their representative in Cairo the necessity of Gordon's going to the Soudan, and as events in that region only too plainly indicated a still higher rising of the tide of revolt, and the annihilation of a force near Suakim having added its disaster to the long sequence of defeat, the opposition to his mission was at length overcome, and on January 18th, 1884, two months all but two days after the news of Kazghil had been received, he is told that the Government would be glad if he would proceed to the Soudan to superintend the evacuation of the Egyptian garrisons, the civil employees, and all the waifs and strays of Egyptian rule that wished to come away. But we must go back for a moment in our record. In mid December Gordon had left the Holy Land intent upon getting to Brussels and entering at once into the service of the King of the Belgians on the Congo. On New Year's Day 1884 he reached Brussels, and there became aware that his project of service would not be sanctioned

by the English Government. He resolved to retire from Her Majesty's service, since he could neither find employment in the army nor serve outside the service. Accordingly, on January 7th, he wrote his letter of resignation, in which he "humbly petitions to be allowed to retire from Her Majesty's service without any claim whatever for pension from Her Majesty's Government," adding that "His Majesty King Leopold II. has most kindly assured me that His Majesty will compensate any pecuniary loss I may incur in leaving Her Majesty's service."

Believing himself now to be free from further restraint upon his actions, he made all arrangements to proceed to the Congo, and by the middle of January everything had been settled. The many and indignant protests against his retirement had had their effect, and his letter of resignation had been answered by the withdrawal of the refusal to permit him to serve on the Congo. He therefore still retained his commission as a general officer with the unemployed pay of that rank. Then he went again to Brussels preparatory to a final start, as he thought, to the Congo; but all this time the great finger which men call Providence or Destiny had been silently weaving another destination for him. The hour had at last struck. No more was this great soul to be permitted to bury itself in unseen wildernesses. He is to go forth indeed into a remote region, but he will draw after him the eyes of all men; and ere this year 1884, which has dawned in such complication of purpose, shall have closed, there will be seen, as though raised aloft upon a colossal pedestal, the figure of this grand centurion, with all the effort of his life, and the honesty of his heart,

and the faith of his soul, made visible to the four points of the earth, written in letters of flame amid the darkness of disaster.

On January 17th Gordon received at noon, in Brussels, a telegram from Lord Wolseley summoning him at once to London. He understood what it meant: those who had first claim had called him, and he obeyed instantly. At 6 A.M. on the morning of the 18th he was in London, and had prolonged interviews with Lord Wolseley. At 3.30 P.M. on the same day he saw several of the Ministers. This last interview is so important, looked at in the light of what followed, that it had best be described in his own words:—[1]

[1] There are contradictory accounts existing of this interview between Gordon and the Ministers on January 18th. I have heard it stated on very high authority that the mission, as contemplated by the English Ministry, did not extend beyond Suakim, from which place a full report was to be sent by Gordon to the Government, both sides holding themselves perfectly free after that point was reached. From Suakim Gordon was to advise the Government as to their Soudan policy, but it by no means followed the Government was to follow the advice.

I have heard the same high authority declare that Gordon, at starting, had specially stipulated he was not to go by way of Cairo. We know that at Port Said he received the pressing invitation which induced him to change his intention and to visit Cairo, but few persons are aware that the English Government knew nothing of the appointment of their officer as Governor-General of the Soudan, or of the change of his destination from Suakim to the Nile route, until some days after both had been effected by our Minister in Cairo. When one remembers the enormous issues that were depending upon this mission, and thinks of the blood and treasure afterwards to be poured out for it, one knows not whether to marvel most at the vagueness in which such colossal results could be initiated, or the strength of the nation which survives such vagueness of direction.

"At noon he, Wolseley, came to me and took me to the Ministers. He went in and talked to the Ministers, and came back and said, 'Her Majesty's Government want you to undertake this: Government are determined to evacuate Soudan, for they will not guarantee future government. Will you go and do it?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Go in.' I went in and saw them. They said, 'Did Wolseley tell you our orders?' I said, 'Yes.' I said, 'You will not guarantee future government of Soudan, and you wish me to go up to evacuate now.' They said, 'Yes,' and it was over, and I left at 8 P.M. for Calais."[1]

There is no necessity to linger long over the events of the following month, during which Gordon and his companion Stewart with rapid steps were travelling their long road to Khartoum, but there are a few points which deserve consideration before we approach the final scene. The difficulty of the task, the acceptance of which he so lightly sketched above, was only equalled by the vagueness of the terms that described it. Vagueness and difficulty were not, however, the worst obstacles against success. These things he had often enough in his life met and conquered. The true *crux* of the problem he had set himself to solve lay in the link of the telegraph which still bound him to Cairo and to England. Gordon was a man whose life had been a series of successes which were the result of a strikingly bold initiative working perfectly free of outside influence. Check him in the slightest degree in any of his bold strokes, introduce some new element of calculation or opinion into his work, and it was certain to fail. He started with a *carte blanche*, but ere he was half-way to Khartoum the telegraph had begun to scrawl its dots

[1] *Letters to Rev. J. Barnes:* London, 1885.

and dashes upon the surface of his yet open programme.

The real work which the governing powers of England and Egypt had to do was a very easy one. They had to see that the road behind their envoy was kept open after he had passed it, and to record a simple, unvarying "Yes" to all his proposals, so long as these proposals did not involve offensive hostilities. For the man was embarked upon a desperate venture, a venture which no rules of so-called sense, no previous parallel, no finely-calculated series, could hope to bring to a successful issue. There are similar desperate cases known in the lives of individual patients whose illness has reached a point where science halts, and the physician, hopelessly realising that the cure has long passed the realm of medicine, says, "This man may have anything he wishes for." So was it now with the evacuation of the garrisons and its added task of establishing some form of government in the Soudan.

Only on the rule of absolute acquiescence in every proposition made by Gordon within the limits of peace was there the remotest possibility of success.

The original intention had been to proceed direct from England to Suakim, and going thence to Khartoum, altogether avoiding Cairo. Whether it would have been possible for him to have penetrated from any port in the Red Sea to the Valley of the Nile above Abu Hamed cannot be now known, but there can be little doubt that it would have been better had he not been deflected from his first purpose, and permitted to make his way as best he pleased without visiting Cairo. Granted, however, that the route from Suakim to Berber was closed

by the Arab revolt, and that it was necessary for Gordon to proceed to Khartoum by the Valley of the Nile and the Korosko desert, what was then the right course for the English and Egyptian Governments to pursue? *Simply to keep open this route across the desert from Korosko to Abu Hamed at all and every cost.* That was the one thing to do, and that was the one thing that was not done. Nothing was easier. We held the Nile to Dongola; Korosko was but a day's steaming above the first cataract; from thence to Abu Hamed the track lay across a desert, which even the Arab cannot permanently live in; put a post of troops at Abu Hamed; hold the intervening single well of Mourat with a small party of loyal Bedouins, and your line of communication is perfect. Assemble one thousand camels at Korosko to follow Gordon with troops and supplies to Abu Hamed; reinforce Berber with another battalion of infantry; hold Abu Hamed with two hundred men, and your work will be done. He will then do the rest. No operation was more feasible than this one, none would have cost so little, none could possibly have been so important. As soon as Gordon reached Khartoum he began to send away the most helpless portion of his garrison, and in the seven or eight weeks during which communication remained open, not less than two thousand five hundred widows, children, and employees reached Korosko from Khartoum, coming across the Nubian desert from Abu Hamed, arriving, according to the statement of the officer receiving them at Korosko, "in an almost perfect state of comfort."[1] If then some two thousand five hundred helpless refugees could come down in an almost perfect state of comfort, how

[1] Speech of Colonel Duncan, M.P.

easily might half that number of soldiers have been sent to Abu Hamed and Berber by the return camels which had conveyed the refugees from these places. As a military operation this despatch of a few hundred men to Abu Hamed was at this time as simple as to send them from Malta to Alexandria. The Ababdeh Arabs were then our firm friends; Hussien Pacha Khalifa, the Egyptian officer in command of Berber, was the sheikh of that tribe; his men would have gone with alacrity upon any service which was in aid of their chief. Abu Hamed was the doorway of the Soudan, the gate of Berber and Khartoum, the one golden key whose possession locked or unlocked the vast prison of that hopeless land. It is really terrible to think that this one cheap, easy, feasible, and absolutely essential precaution should not have been taken, and the rival authorities in Cairo should, during those precious months of grace that were still left to us, have been wildly building earth-works at Assouan, sending soldiers to Luxor and Esneh, squandering tens of thousands of pounds in subsidising Bedouins in the deserts close to Lower Egypt, who are to this day as separated from the Soudan as if they had dwelt in Syria, and that no thought of the real thing to be done appears ever to have entered the head of Minister or General, Pacha, Mudir, or Miralai. In the month of February a most costly English expedition was indeed sent to Suakim, but that was in every sense a mistaken line of operations. The expedition roused the fury of the Soudanese to fever-pitch. The connection between Gordon's presence in Khartoum and a projected conquest of the country by the English seemed at once apparent. It was the one thing that was wanted to band together

the many tribes and races of the Soudan in the bond of a common and intense fanaticism. There cannot now be the shadow of a doubt that the sending of a British force to Suakim in the end of February 1884, and the neglect of the simple precaution to keep open the Korosko route by placing a small Egyptian garrison at Abu Hamed and by reinforcing Berber with Egyptian troops, cost us millions of money, lost us many valuable lives, and, worse than spent millions or lost lives, cost us the life of Gordon.

We have seen that Gordon, abandoning under pressure his first intention of trying the Red Sea route, had gone to Cairo, where he remained two days; then continuing his journey up the Nile he reached Korosko, one hundred miles above Assouan, on the evening of February 1st. At Cairo he had received a firman from the Khedive appointing him once more Governor-General of the Soudan, reiterating the general objects of evacuation, and adding a "trust" that on the completion of the retirement of the garrisons, organised government would be established in the provinces of the Soudan.[1]

At Korosko, on the morning of February 2d, Gordon mounted his camel and turned off into the great

[1] EXTRACT FROM LETTER TO LORD WOLSELEY.

"CAIRO, 26.1.84.

"I leave to-night *viâ* Korosko as Governor-General, with the same instructions (*i.e.* to evacuate the Soudan) as you told me, and H.M.'s Ministers also did. I go with every confidence and trust in God. . . . Several ask me, 'Do you advise abandonment of Soudan?' I answer, 'How will you answer these two questions? 1st. Will H.M.'s Government guarantee future government of Soudan? 2d. Will H.M.'s Government sanction funds from Cairo to go to Soudan to the detriment of the creditors?' None can answer these questions in affirmative."

Nubian desert. Korosko is a gloomy spot. Dark rugged hills, burnt by the sun as though they were blocks of half-cooled lava, fence in a narrow open space on the edge of the Nile. Through these arid heights a path leads off to the south. It is the track to Abu Hamed. Beyond these gaunt hills the desert opens out into extended expanses of sand, varied by lonely ridges, rugged out-crops of volcanic rock, and deep *wadys* (valleys), but everywhere a dry and withered world, which even among the desert Arabs bears the name of the "Bahr-Bela-Moya" (Waterless Sea). For two hundred and fifty miles this great expanse of desolation lies within the loop or bend which the Nile makes from the point near Abu Hamed, where it turns almost back upon its original course, to where, flowing north again, it passes Korosko after a total distance of not less than seven hundred miles from Abu Hamed.

We have repeatedly seen how, in former years, Gordon had dashed off upon some distant enterprise with his plan of campaign still all unsettled, trusting to his old counsellor, "the cushioned footfall of the camel," to find him a solution of his problem ere he reached the scene of action. So it was this time in the great enterprise he was now bound for. Of such importance was his presence at the distant scene of trouble that he had left London without any of the absolute necessaries of travel. At Cairo, too, he had neglected to provide himself with these essential requisites of health and comfort. Filled with the one all-absorbing thought of reaching the scene of danger as quickly as possible, he allowed everything to stand aside before that great end. Now, at Korosko, the moment for thought had arrived. Once embarked

upon the sand waves of the Waterless Sea, he would revolve in his mind the vast problem in his front.

Looking at these problems now, the feeling is one of astonishment that the mission could ever have appeared anything save what it was—a hopeless task, beyond the power of mortal man to compass. Difficult enough would it have been to withdraw, in a time of perfect peace, the garrisons with their enormous *entourage* of helpless people from these remote stations, some of them as far removed from Khartoum as Khartoum was itself distant from Cairo, but utterly impossible while the most powerful factor in the Soudan world, the Mahdi, was hostile to the withdrawing power. During the six days that Gordon was tearing across the Nubian desert all the difficulties before him had time to take shape and substance, but his mind was not of the type to admit the impossible in any form, and quick as difficulties arose he had some counter-project ready to overcome them. Was it impossible to remove the garrisons of the Equatorial regions by this Korosko route? Then he would leave them for the last, and having sent down the Khartoum and Berber people across the Waterless Sea, he would take his steamers to the Upper River, and proclaim the provinces of the Bahr Gazelle and the Equator as portions of the Congo State under the King of the Belgians. Was the Mahdi likely to move on the Nile while the evacuation was going on? That danger would be anticipated by opening direct negotiations with Mahomet Achmet, and perhaps by a personal visit to him in Kordofan. Was there an absolute impossibility of establishing any form of settled government to succeed the Egyptian rule about to be abolished?

Then he would ask the Government of Cairo to send Zebehr Rahama at once to Khartoum, and would appoint that astute sheikh as Sultan of the New Soudan. Finally, supposing everything to go wrong, the means of evacuation to fail, and the spread of the Arab revolt to involve the entire country in its flames, he had still the one art of which he was so thorough a master. "If your Government wants war," had said Napoleon to the English Ambassador towards the close of the short peace of Amiens, "they can have it; we are not altogether ignorant of war." To governing powers in Cairo and London the quickly-shifting points from which these different and apparently differing possibilities had to be regarded, and the almost opposite courses of action by which they must be met, could not help wearing the aspect of inconsistency. This was the misfortune which we have already alluded to by saying the real *crux* of Gordon's trouble lay in the telegraph behind him, unless the rule had been made absolute that the wire was to be used solely to receive orders from Khartoum, and to give back an unquestioning "Yes" to every proposal that did not involve war. The electric wire is a marvellous addition to man's power when it is in powerful hands, but it is a terrible engine of national destruction when it induces a Minister, seated in an office-chair, to imagine that he sees the full depth of the horizon which the man of action is beholding at the far end of the telegraph.

On the sixth evening of his travel Gordon reached Abu Hamed. The mists appeared to have lightened. "All seems hopeful," he writes on the day following his arrival. He thinks that things are settling down, and

"that in a month the country will be quiet and the roads open." Four days later the little caravan reaches Berber. By this time he has decided in his mind the difficult question whether he will publish or keep secret the Firman of evacuation. All the weight of human wisdom counsels secrecy; but on the other hand has he not accepted this mission in order to remove the garrisons? Is not that the entire reason of his presence? and how is he to begin his work without the first boat-load of retiring officials giving the lie to any other declaration? No, he has come to remove the Egyptian garrisons, to cut the link which has bound the Soudan to Egypt, and to establish some form of settled government in place of the one that is to be removed. How are these things to be done in the face of any denial of their intention? He must be false to every word he has spoken to the English Government, and to every word they have spoken to him, if he does not begin at once the work of evacuation. It would seem that he had long wrestled in his mind upon this question, and the outcome of the conflict was to stand fast by the truth. At Berber he assembles the notables and openly proclaims the object of his mission. The Soudan is henceforth to be severed from Egypt, local governments are to be established, and militias raised. Then he pursues his route to Khartoum.

But all this time there was one power, and that by far the most important one, that nobody appears to have reckoned with. It was the Mahdi. He had been shut out from calculations alike by Gordon and by the Governments, as sometimes men will exclude from their forecast of events the one disagreeable element which can

upset all their calculations. And yet the Mahdi had already proved himself a very potent factor in this business.

That the governing bodies in Cairo and London should be slow to give importance to any movement which had religious fervour as its mainspring is not to be wondered at, but that Gordon should have so long failed to grasp the true significance of the spirit which the Mahdi had evoked among the Mohammedan races of the Soudan is indeed a strange fact. "I do not believe in advance of Mahdi, who is nephew to my old guide in Darfour, who was a very good fellow," he writes from Korosko. Again, he says "that he does not think it possible the Mahdi can advance from Kordofan." A month earlier he had taken a different and a juster view of the situation. "I see," he said to a newspaper reporter in London, "it is proposed to fortify Wadi Halfa and prepare there to resist the Mahdi's attack. You might as well fortify against a fever. Contagion of that kind cannot be kept out by fortifications and garrisons." This view, held in January, appears to have changed as Gordon drew nearer the scene of his labours. It was the Soudan of his own experience of five years ago that he was now looking at—the Soudan of a thousand tribes and a thousand separate grievances—but since that time a new spirit had come into the land; all the old fervour of Islam had awakened, and in the white heat of religious fanaticism the dividing lines between tribe and nation had been melted down into one vast revolt. On February 18th Gordon reached Khartoum and took up his quarters in the palace which had so often in past years been his lonely home, and which was destined a few months later to become his tomb. "He had come

again to hold the balance level," he told the people. "There were to be no more Bashi-Bazouks. He had not brought troops, but had come alone. He would not fight with any weapons but justice." Then the chains are struck off the captives' limbs in the crowded prisons; the records of unremitted taxes are burned in the palace square; and the stocks and bastinado instruments are broken up. All seemed for the moment hopeful, but the real importance of the outlook on this first day in Khartoum lies in the fact that ere the day had closed he asks that Zebehr Rahama may be sent up at once to the Soudan. The true strength of the Mahdi is again visible to him.

And now from February 18th to April 8th, 1884, there went on all that interchange of thought between Khartoum and Cairo, all those varied suggestions, all that answering back of vital proposals by questions that seem framed as though their object could only be to gain time; all that long diplomatic dialogue which, when we read it now in the light of the silence that ensued and of the tragedy which followed the silence, seems like the throwing of straws to a drowning man. Sifted from the mass of diplomatic verbiage in which they lie, the proposals made by Gordon during these days of grace amount to this: (1) Send me Zebehr Rahama at once. Without him I have no counterpoise to set against the all-powerful influence of the Mahdi. (2) I can see no way of effecting the evacuation of even the Upper Nile garrisons by the line of Berber and Korosko. I therefore propose to send the Khartoum and Berber garrisons north, under Colonel Stewart, and to take the steamers and stores south, up the Nile to the Bahr

Gazelle province, which the King of the Belgians will incorporate into the Congo State. (3) Immediate steps must be taken to reopen the route from Suakim to Berber, and Turkish troops must be sent to the Soudan. Zebehr, evacuation south and north, Turkish troops—these were the three main proposals by which the objects of his mission might yet be achieved. Then the cloud of silence came down, and the last act of Gordon's life began.

But although the real *cordon* of silence did not close around Khartoum until the beginning of April, Berber, the key to the whole Soudan and to all chance of reaching the Soudan, was invested by the Mahdi's troops in the end of March, and fell to them in April. Fatal and hope-destroying error, this all-important spot was left with a wretched garrison of six hundred men, while Abu Hamed, the next essential link in the route to Egypt, held no garrison at all. Who was responsible for this terrible mistake? Whether wisdom is really to be found among many counsellors may well be an open question in these our times, but of one thing there can be little doubt, that among many counsellors responsibility is soon lost, and in the maze of Governments, Ministers, and Generals that existed in Cairo in 1883-84—for it is Cairo that must bear the full responsibility of the neglect of a most obvious precaution—it is hopeless to follow the trail of error to its real source.

So far as the matter lay between the principals at each end, Gordon in the Soudan and the English Government at home, it is easy enough to define the exact measure of serviceship on one side and of support on the other. He was charged to carry out (1) the peaceful evacuation of the garrisons; (2) the peaceful

establishment of some form of government. There was to be no fighting; the Soudan was to be severed from Egypt, and upon the desirability of that severance and the peaceful nature of the mission both Gordon and the Government were in close accord. Clearly, then, it was the duty of the Government to have gone to every length demanded by their servant which did not involve them in actual war. And now comes in the fatal result of the visit to Cairo. Not only were nine-tenths of the official world of Cairo—English and Egyptian, civil and military—opposed to a peaceful evacuation of the Soudan, but there was a large majority of what may be called the permanent Government of England also opposed to it, and it is now but too clear an historical fact that these powerful parties at home and in Egypt did not hesitate to use the name and the mission of Gordon as instruments to their own ends, these ends being the very opposite of what the English Government wished. The meaning of the term "permanent" Government in England may appear strange; but there is a Government of England, and a very powerful one too, which is always in office—a Government that has no more relation to the will of the majority of the people of England than it has to the wishes of the people of Van Diemen's land. In every public office, in the army and navy, in the countless departments of the State, this permanent Conservative Government is entrenched, and if any person cares to study why a Liberal Executive seems to have a confirmed habit of ill-fortune almost always attached to its policy, when that policy lies outside its direct relation with the people of England, he will find the real reason of such mishaps in the

antagonism ever existing between the passing Liberal Executive Administration and the permanent Official Conservative Government that lies beneath it. If the Administration of the United States knows no such habit of ill-fortune it is because the wisdom of its founders took measures to ensure that the American Executive and its servants should be always working in the harmony of a common purpose.

The real error committed by the English Government was in having embarked in this tremendous undertaking without a due calculation of the cost. Even a moderate amount of consideration would have shown them that an evacuation of the garrisons was impossible without one of two things taking place. Either there must be war with the Mahdi, or there must be arrangement with the Mahdi. Now, if there was to be no war there should instantly have been negotiation. Gordon's first intention was that upon reaching Khartoum he would himself proceed to Kordofan for the purpose of coming to terms directly with Mahomet Achmet. This intention has since been contradicted, but the evidence of it is so strong, and the action would have been so completely in harmony with his previous proceeding in Darfour and Abyssinia, that there can be little doubt he intended at one time to visit the Mahdi. He received an order not to do so. He asked for Zebehr: Zebehr was refused. He proposed to evacuate the garrisons south as well as north: this was declined. Each of these proposals lay within the realm of peace, and as such, their refusal was manifestly wrong. And let us bear in mind that these three propositions and these three negatives were the first

steps in the tragedy. After them the sequence of trouble came fast enough. On the one hand the Government would not move to the extreme limit demanded by peace; on the other they were induced by the permanent Government beneath them and by the representatives of that party in Cairo and in England, who were ever ready "to cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war," to embark upon a part-policy of force and to send an expedition to attempt the relief of the garrisons of Sinkat and Tokar. They refused, in fact, to allow their servant to proceed upon the lines of peace which seemed to him the best to follow, and they followed the path of force just far enough to exasperate the people of the Soudan by a useless slaughter of a splendid Arab tribe, whose blood, shed without honour or result to us, called aloud to every Arab of the desert for vengeance against us. From the moment the battle of Tamai was fought in March 1884 all hope of a peaceful solution of Gordon's mission was gone. Then the matter became a struggle between the permanent under Government and the temporary upper Government. Too late the latter realised their errors in refusing the first proposals of their servant, and in exasperating the Arabs by the Suakim slaughters. The door of peace had been slammed at Tamai, and the Arab was as certain to take his revenge at Khartoum as the sun of the Soudan was to shine. But having begun the work of exasperation at Suakim there was clearly no other policy than to continue it. The gage had now been thrown down, the harm was done, and although the near approaching summer season might well have made men hesitate ere they sent English soldiers to certain death under the most terrible

sun in the world, still there should have been the fullest and most timely preparation made so as to be ready to launch the relieving force upon its road at the earliest moment it was possible for European life to stand the slowly lessening heats of the Nubian autumn.

There is nothing clearer in the painful records of these early months of 1884 than the connection existing between the English operations at Suakim and the Arab investment of Khartoum.

In the middle of February the road from Abu Hamed to Berber and on to Khartoum was open and unmolested. A week later English troops in large numbers are landed at Suakim. On February 29th the action of El-Teb is fought, and the news spreads like wildfire that the English have begun the conquest of the Soudan by a great slaughter of Arabs. A few days later comes the still more sanguinary encounter at Tamai. There can no longer be the shadow of a doubt as to the object of this lavish expenditure of blood and treasure. The departure of the hated Turk is only to be the signal for the arrival of the detested Infidel. All the hesitation which had before existed in the minds of the Arab tribes around Khartoum instantly disappears. On March 8th Gordon hears that the powerful Shukrieah, hitherto friendly, have declared against him. On the same day news is received that the Sheikh el-Obeid intends to cut the Berber-Khartoum Road. From Shendy comes intelligence that hostile Arabs are approaching that place; all these movements and rumours of movements are on the north and east of Khartoum, the sides nearest to Suakim.

On March 10th the situation has become still more

threatening. The village of El-Fon, on the Blue Nile, is reported to be "full of rebel Arabs with banners." The Sheikh el-Mugdi, a leader supposed to be faithful to the Government, reports most of the sheikhs in and around Khartoum to be traitors. Many of the Government clerks in the city are also false. Berber and Khartoum will be simultaneously attacked, he thinks.

At noon on this day the telegraph wire is severed between Shendy and Berber, and on the following morning, March 11th, a large force of Arabs appears on the right bank of the Blue Nile within sight of Khartoum. The Suakim expedition was described at the time as being due to "Parliament having forced the running" of the Government. Alas, that momentous issues of life, death, and disaster should be made the weapons with which the ignoble strife of party is carried on. This forcing of the hand of Government also forced the Arab hand. Before it the chances of evacuation had certainly not diminished during the first fortnight of the experiment, nay, they had steadily improved, but henceforth there was no hope.

The operations around Suakim lasted exactly three weeks. When they began, Khartoum was open on every side; when they ended, the siege had begun.

For nearly the first six months following the cutting off of communication with Khartoum we know little of what took place in the beleaguered city. During March, April, and May ceaseless labour in earth-works, mines, wire-entanglements, expeditions for food, went on; there was a good deal of desultory firing and fighting. In the middle of March, four days after the Arabs first sat down before Khartoum, a battle occurred in which a

portion of the garrison was signally defeated. The two Pachas in command, accused by their soldiers of treachery, were tried by court-martial and put to death. The cry of "treason" by beaten troops is a dangerous one to listen to, and whatever may have been the faults of Saïd and Hassan Pachas, there can be no doubt that their execution was all too hastily decided on, and was a matter of deep regret to Gordon during the remainder of the siege.

As the Nile rose, the position of Khartoum became improved. The Arabs had placed their camps of investment at some distance up the Blue and White Niles, and when the rivers were high and the sand-banks covered it became easier for the armed steamers to inflict damage upon the enemy.

The intention of the Arabs was evidently to wear out the patience of the garrison by scarcity of food, and by the moral effect of a continuous attack always kept up, but never pressed home to a decisive point; and there is a significant entry in the summary of the events of the first six months of the siege that Gordon wrote to Lord Wolseley which shows how well these tactics succeeded. "The square was always broken," he writes. At last the river was at its topmost height; if any effort was to be made to communicate with the outer world it must be done at once. It is now September: for six months the weary work has gone on: three months' food yet remains. Is there no one coming over that vast desert to the north, whose level horizon is visible for leagues and leagues from the palace-roof, where day after day Gordon and his two companions, Stewart and Power, look out in expectation? All the plans for evacua-

tion, government, and settlement of the Soudan have long ago given place to a weary fight against odds for life. Has the world gone to sleep away there, twelve hundred miles beyond that clear-cut line of sky and desert? What are all these armies of Egypt and of England doing? You have untold stores of gold, and can you not at least make it into keys to unlock this terrible silence, sending us messengers if you will not send us soldiers?

Among the eight steamers which at this moment were afloat at Khartoum there was a small paddle-boat named the *Abbas*. With light draught of water, narrow beam, and easily handled, this little craft seemed just the one to accomplish in safety the descent of the river from Khartoum to Dongola. It could only be hoped to effect this descent during the height of the inundation, when the unnumbered and unknown cataracts of Dar Monassir had thirty and forty feet of water pouring over their rugged stair-ways. On the night of September 9th the *Abbas* started on her voyage down stream. She carried Colonel Stewart, Mr. Power, M. Herbin the French consul, eighteen Greeks, and some forty or fifty soldiers. Correspondence, siege-journals, despatches, telegrams to be sent from Dongola,—everything of interest was put on board, and when the next morning broke one solitary man alone remained in the palace at Khartoum.

From that day forward a new life began. Whatever in the past had been the wear and tear of the siege; the anxiety of this sleepless watch; the sickening sense of desertion without and treachery within; the knowledge that the men whose advice and action had brought about this terrible catastrophe were lying on soft beds, eating

dainty food, and heaping up larger balances with their bankers, while *he* was here, in famine and misery, to bear the load of the sins, the intrigues, and the falsehoods he had so long denounced—all this had henceforth to be borne alone, without the aid of a single friend, or the voice of one sympathetic heart to aid him in this long and terrible trial. And yet, in the great picture of his daily life which on the night of September 10th he first began to paint, there are a thousand touches that tell us he is easier and happier and more at rest now than in the seven months that have passed since he first undertook this task. For the issues are now clear. No longer are there doubts as to conflicting lines of policy and differing interpretations of men's meaning. To God and to his country he is now alone answerable. The real test has at last come; the real test of all teaching, the measure of all philosophy, the sum of all religion—that at no point between him and death is there to be a hauling down of the flags of Faith and Duty which he has nailed above his crucifixion.

For that this heroic soul had now come to look upon his life as a sacrifice to be given in atonement for the sins of his fellow-countrymen in Egypt is beyond dispute. "I feel that all these wrongs can only be washed out in blood," he wrote from Jerusalem in the end of 1883. A few months later, writing on March 4th from Khartoum, he uses these words—than which there are none more memorable in all his life: "May our Lord not visit us as a nation for our sins, but may His wrath fall on me, hid in Christ. This is my frequent prayer, and may He spare these people, and bring them to peace."

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST MONTHS AT KHARTOUM

We must turn away for a moment from the spectacle of this solitary sufferer for the sins of others, and look out beyond the desert horizon to the north.

We shall have to travel a very long way through the wilderness before falling in with even the outposts of the army that is coming to the rescue, for at length action has been evolved out of a chaos of counsellors and men have begun to move slowly up the Nile; depôts of military stores are being formed at Assouan and Wadi Halfa, and on this very day, September 10th, the first steamers carrying boats for the passage of the cataracts are leaving England. It is not yet a month since sanction for the building of these Nile boats has been given, and already one hundred of them are on their road to Egypt. It is a curious coincidence that the day which sees the first steamer of the Relief Expedition leaving England is that upon which the ill-fated *Abbas* started with Stewart, Power, and the French consul from Khartoum. Five months later these Nile boats will reach the spot where the *Abbas* lies a battered wreck on the rocks of Dar Djuma, while the blood-stained

relics of her murdered passengers and crew are blowing about in the sands of Hebbeh.

And what, it may well be asked, had been the action taken during all those months since the fall of Berber had sealed the last hope of a peaceful evacuation of Khartoum? Ah! the answer to that question is indeed a sad one. May, June, July, and almost half-way through August before an undecided Executive above, and congested clerkships, rival theories, and varying ambitions below, can shape themselves into any fixed plan of action. It is by railway from Suakim to Berber that you must relieve Khartoum, say one set of counsellors. But the route has many mountains, and the passes are three thousand and four thousand feet above sea-level, and for distances of eighty miles there is not a drop of water along the proposed line, and the Arab-enemy swarms at Suakim and at Berber, reply others who have learnt a little of the realities of life in the wilderness. It will take two campaigns and two years' labour to complete such a line. No; the true route of advance is the one which Nature points out. The Nile in its long reaches of open water gives easy transport for men and stores, and even in its worst cataract it yields that first necessary of desert-warfare—water.

Thus during the early summer months of 1884 the strife of routes went on. Things almost impossible now to credit were done. Contracts for the railroad between Suakim and Berber were gravely discussed and given out, officers were sent from Egypt to England to ascertain by protracted experiments at Aldershot whether it would be possible to pump condensed water from the Bay of Suakim to the top of the height of land between that

place and Berber, a distance of nearly one hundred miles, and some three thousand five hundred feet above the level of the sea. It was found that water could indeed be pumped a considerable distance, but two things were also discovered which put a stop to further researches into this interesting question—the water came out at the end of the third or fourth mile at a temperature of boiling-point, and it was also seen that, between condensing and pumping through pipes, water delivered at the height of land between the Red Sea and the Nile would cost per quart about the price of the choicest brands of celebrated vintages.

But while the various counsellors of the Executive were thus urging their different projects of relief upon a reluctant Government, the spectacle of the single heroic soldier afar off in the desert was daily sending a deeper thrill through the big heart of that nation which knows so little of the work that is going on in its name, and throughout the land the cry for help was growing louder.

It was at the end of the first week in August that the English Government finally decided to send out a relief expedition to the Soudan, but for another week after that date it was still possible for them to point with truth to the conflicting counsels and opposite opinions of their advisers at home and on the Nile.

It was on the evening of August 12th that the project of a boat-expedition, first put forward by Lord Wolseley in April and often urged by him in the succeeding months, was at length sanctioned. The race had now become a desperate one. The price that must be paid for time wasted in diluted despatch and condensed telegram, for all the windy methods of administra-

tive delay, has to be given in flesh and blood; and yet there is still time to win, but no hour can be let slip, no mile of all those thousands must be put off, even from sunset to the next sunrise; and not one of the ten thousand links in the chain of this immense effort can be slackened for a single moment.

Writing on September 17th Gordon, summing up the reports that have reached him during the previous week of the advance of English troops by the Nile Valley to relieve Khartoum, says, "I have the strongest suspicion that these tales of troops at Dongola and Meroe are all gas-works, and that if you wanted to find Her Majesty's forces you would have to go to Shepheard's hotel in Cairo." Alas, this estimate was even too sanguine! It is true the first infantry battalion did reach Dongola about that date, but the boats which were to carry men and food over the cataracts of the Batn-el-Hager were only beginning to arrive at Alexandria; and the troops destined to form the desert column which was to cross the Bayuda from Korti to Metemma had not yet quitted England.

Khartoum, a name now deeply cut in our history, was six years ago a place that seldom caught the ear of the outside world. It marks what Americans call "the Forks" of the Nile, the spot where the Blue and White Rivers unite their waters to form that grand stream which has still to roll some eighteen hundred miles to the sea. At low water a tongue or spit of land projects between the two rivers, and gives Khartoum its name, "the Elephant's Trunk." It was at this spot that Ismail, the son of Mehemet Ali, and the first modern Egyptian conqueror of the Soudan, crossed his army of Turks in

1820 over the White Nile before marching along the Blue Nile to Sennaar. No building of any sort then marked the point. "The army," wrote an American who was an officer in the Pacha's service, "on crossing the Bahr-el-Abiad encamped on the point of land below which the Bahr-el-Abiad and the Nile join each other." A year or two later the first settlement was made at the Elephant's Trunk, and in a short time Khartoum became the seat of Turkish Government and the capital of the Soudan.

The possession of the valley of the Nile opened to the Egyptians a new and unlimited slave-field. Merchants who combined the dual pursuits of slaves and ivory settled at this central station, which commanded access alike to Abyssinia and the Equatorial regions. Khartoum soon became the great inland emporium of slavery; from it the merchants despatched their hunting-parties of armed Nubians into those vast regions where the Shillook, Dinka, and Bongo had before dwelt in blissful ignorance of the Turk and his civilisation. Perhaps, with the exception of Bristol and Liverpool, no other city had ever in modern times centred in it so much of that terrible traffic which for so many centuries has desolated Africa.

So little apprehensive of attack were the successive rulers of the Soudan that no attempt to fortify the city was made, and when in 1881 the Mahdi first raised at Abba Island the standard, with the strange device of Cross and Koran, Khartoum on the land-side was an open town. During the next three years, as successive defeats at the hands of the new revolt of Islam alarmed the Egyptian authorities more and more, earth-works

were raised between the two rivers, and detached forts were erected at Omderman and other places. All these works were, however, in a most unfinished state when Gordon arrived at Khartoum in February 1884, and not the least of the many subjects to which his attention was at once given was the defence of the city.

Nearly all the records and journals of that period have perished, and we know only in briefest outline what was done to put the town in a state of defence. Wire-entanglements were stretched in front of the earth-works, mines laid under all the approaches, the steamers were sheeted with plates and mounted with guns, new boats were put together in the arsenal, and all the craft of the sapper set in use to prepare for the attack which from the first week of arrival was seen to be impending. At this time the population of Khartoum numbered about sixty thousand souls. As the siege went on, a third of this number were sent away as the open, or known, adherents of the Mahdi. Of the forty thousand still remaining, it is probable that a large proportion still cherished feelings of sympathy with the revolt, and that fully half of the entire population were in even balance of mind between the old government and the new prophet.

Nor would these numbers give anything like a just idea of the relative values of the rival forces existing even in the close neighbourhood of the capital. The loyalists, if we may use that term to men whose main loyalty consisted in devotion to the property which they possessed, were men who wished to have their fighting done for them. The rebels, if we may call those rebels who were at that time described by the highest authority in England "as men rightly struggling to be

free," and of whom Gordon had so frequently said that they had the highest sanction for their revolt,[1] were men who did their own fighting without pay or reward save that which the battle-field gave them. Put out in the open, and given similar weapons to decide the question, it would not be too much to say that one thousand Arab dervishes would have scattered and destroyed twenty thousand of their opponents.

One fact Khartoum had in favour of its defence. It possessed an excellent arsenal, which was not only well supplied with munitions, but had in its workshops and trained employees means of replenishing many of its warlike stores. In the early months of the investment nothing was left undone that the ceaselessly active mind of the commander could devise to secure the position. Despite absence of staff, an army dispirited by defeat, and a population fully half in opposition, Gordon created, strengthened, and supplied. Now at last he was at home. Not one-tenth of what he did in these earlier months will ever be known; the story of his wonderful effort sleeps in the wilderness of the Monassir, where the ill-fated *Abbas*, carrying such precious freight, met her end; but we know enough by the result; for ten long months Khartoum held out until it fell at last from famine.

Among the bits of torn paper blowing about in the sands near the wreck of the *Abbas* the writer of these pages picked up one that gave a glimpse of some of the

[1] "Note that I do not call our enemies 'rebels' but 'Arabs,'" he writes on September 12th, "for it is a vexed question if we are not rebels, seeing I hold the Firman restoring the Soudan to its chiefs." —*Journals.*

shifts of defence resorted to. It was a page of some nameless diary that had been kept by one of the passengers—probably Power. This leaflet described how "the General" had bought in the bazaar many hundred yards of cotton, and dyeing it earth-colour had stretched it out in long sloping lines, making it appear at a distance like the angle and colour of earth-works, so as to deceive the Arabs while real works were constructed farther back. But the activity of the leader was not confined to his own professional engineer-duties. How he replenished the supplies of food for garrison and people. How he literally made money from an exhausted treasury. How he kept up an unceasing correspondence with the hostile chiefs, refuting the claim of the Mahdi to his mission. How he created an army out of the wretched remnants of officers and men which four successive years of defeat, ending with the crowning disaster of the force of Hicks Pacha, had left existing. How over and over again he sent out through the hostile lines that surrounded him spies and messengers to take news to, and bring tidings from, the Relief Expedition. How in fact for ten long months he stood the sole spring of the great machine he had created — baffling conspiracy within, facing hostility without, feeding the poor, visiting the sick, watching by night and working by day—without the hope to cheer him through this terrible martyrdom that the far-away home, in which he had so long been a stranger, would even thank him for what he was doing—all this is but the bare record of these wonderful Journals,[1] whose possession, won by

[1] *The Journals of Major-General Gordon at Khartoum:* London, 1885.

the toil and labour of the Nile Expedition and by the blood shed at Abu Klea and before Metemma, would have been cheaply purchased at even far heavier cost. For the value of the lessons taught by these Journals is priceless, if it be learned by us in fitting spirit of sorrow and depth of humility, but terrible in its condemnation if it is to be made another plank in the platform of pride, another stone in the idol of our covetousness.

Let us tear ourselves away for a moment from the sophistries which national pride and greed have woven about this chapter of Khartoum. What is the lesson of it all? During these three memorable months, from September 10th to December 14th, a solitary man is sitting writing his last thoughts for us.

All the while we are spending millions of money in fruitless efforts to reach him. We cannot do so. Late though our date of setting out has been, there is still time to effect the object of the expedition and to save Gordon and Khartoum, but a greater order has gone forth than any man can compass with millions or with men. We are not to get back this heroic soul, whose life we have so long ignored. Not a shred of his coat, not a lock of his hair, grown gray in our service, is to come forth, but every word of the lesson is to reach us. Night after night he will set down a hundred truths which, had he written them at home in England, not one in ten thousand among us would ever have looked at, but now the magnificence of this martyrdom will force us to listen to these last words. We will see him as we have never before seen him, and, like a voice from the dead, the words of the prophet he so often quoted, "Not by

might, nor by an army, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts," will be brought home to us in the knell of this disaster.

In the three weeks of September which find record in the Khartoum Journals many important events took place. It was on the 21st of the month that authentic news first reached Gordon of a relief expedition being actually on the road. Three days later he resolves upon sending his armed steamers to Metemma to await the arrival of the troops, and on the 30th of the month the vessels start for the rendezvous.

At this time the attack of the Arabs on the town is not pressed close, the Mahdi is still far away in Kordofan, and his lieutenants, the Sheikhs el-Obeid and Negumi, keep their investing forces on the Blue and White Niles some miles back from the outworks. It is still easy to reach Shendy, one hundred miles north, even by land. A good deal of desertion is going on among the black troops of the Arabs, the store of grain and provision in the town is yet ample, and the spirit of the garrison is fairly good. Actual fighting is confined to distant rifle-fire, and still more distant exchange of shells between Arab batteries and the steamers. All these things find full record in the eighty pages of closely printed diary which describe this interval; but the wonderful fact revealed in these pages is the matchless spirit of the man who writes them. Never has the breath of life been breathed into a more indomitable breast. Never has human soul looked out from its prison-house in greater gaiety of heart. Night after night this solitary soldier sits down after a day of anxiety, of toil, of mental and bodily labour, such as not one man in ten million ever knows,

to write his thoughts for us. Is it a gloomy record of trouble? Is it despairing accusations against the fate or the men that have brought about this state of affairs? Not a bit of it. Page after page of vivid description, of practical philosophy, of sound common sense, shrewd observation of men, and humorous touches of satire, that make us forget every surrounding of the writer's suffering in the absolute freshness and gaiety of the heart they reveal to us.

The Journal is a complete laying bare of the man's mind. No attempt to excuse a fault or to shift responsibility, never a word spoken to the gallery, nor yet a sentence that seems to indicate a thought that it is his last testament he is really writing, and how lowly is the estimate of self which he gives us in the midst of this superb heroism. Here is what the most heroic heart of the nineteenth century has to say about his own courage :—

"During our blockade we have often discussed the question of being frightened, which in the world's view a man should never be. For my part I am always frightened and very much so. I fear the future of all engagements. It is not the fear of death, that is past, thank God, but I fear defeat and its consequences. I do not believe a bit in the calm, unmoved man. I think it is only that he does not show it outwardly. Thence I conclude that no commander of forces ought to live closely in relation with his subordinates, who watch him like lynxes, for there is no contagion equal to that of fear. I have been rendered furious when from anxiety I could not eat, I would find those at the same table were in like manner affected."

And again he writes :—

"I think if instead of Minor Tactics or books on art of war we were to make our young officers study Plutarch's

Lives, it would be better; there we see men (unsupported by any true belief—pure pagans) making *as matter of course* their lives a sacrifice, but in our days it is our highest merit not to run away. I speak for myself when I say I have been in dire anxiety, not for my own skin, but because I hate to be beaten, and I hate to see my schemes fail, but that I have had to undergo a tithe of what any nurse has to undergo who is attached to a querulous invalid is absurd, and not to be weighed together. When I emerge, all are complimentary. When the invalid dies the question is, What shall be given to the nurse for her services?"

And here is what the man who at this moment is doing the finest bit of hero-work ever done by any of his countrymen himself says of that work:—

"A member of Parliament in one of our last received papers asks 'Whether officers are not supposed to go where they are ordered?' I quite agree with his view, but it cannot be said I was ordered to go. The subject was too complex for any order. It was, 'Will you go and try?' and my answer was, 'Only too delighted.' As for all that may be said as to why I did not escape with Stewart, it is simply because the people would not have been such fools as to let me go; so, there is an end of these 'great-coats' of self-sacrifice, etc."

Whenever he lifts his mind from matters that relate to his surroundings, and glances back at the long catalogue of mistaken policy and obstinate adherence to error, there is not a touch of real hardness in his criticism of others. One diplomatist who, he thinks, is mainly responsible for the disasters of Egypt he calls "the Siren;" another official, whose telegram he has just received demanding in this eleventh hour of agony to be "informed *exactly* when he, Gordon, expects to be in difficulties as to provisions and ammunition," he thinks

must be preparing "a great statistical work," and that this information is needed for "literary purposes."

"If he," the sender of the message, "will only turn to the archives (a delicious word) of his office, he will see we have been in difficulties for provisions for some months. It is as if a man on the bank, having seen his friend in a river already bobbed down two or three times, hails, 'I say, old fellow, let us know when we are to throw you the life-buoy. I know you have bobbed down two or three times, but it is a pity to throw you the life-buoy until you are *in extremis*, and I want to know exactly.'"

And yet even this bantering criticism, though the point of it is his own life and death, is blamable, he thinks. "Blessed is the man who does not sit in the seat of the scornful," he writes. "I own it is not right to scoff at one's superiors, but I do not do it in malice, and I hope those who are remarked upon will not be offended. Life is a very leaden business, and if any one can lighten it, so much the better."

On September 29th, the steamers being ready to start for Metemma, Gordon sums up his resolutions as to his future line of conduct. Having said that it is one of his "joys he is never to see Great Britain again," but that he "hopes to get out of this affair, and to go to the Congo either by the Equatorial provinces or by Brussels," he continues:—

"I say this in order that those who may have to do with me may know how very determined a man's will must be who does not wish (and indeed *will not ever*) go back to England again, and to whom continuance in Her Majesty's service, except for the honour of it, is a matter of indifference. My idea is to induce Her Majesty's Government to undertake the extrication of all people or garrisons, now

hemmed in or captive, and that if this is not their programme then to resign my commission and do what I can to obtain it (the object). As long as a man remains in Her Majesty's service he is bound to obey his superiors, but if he resigns he cannot be held insubordinate if he disobeys; perhaps," he adds, "one may risk dismissal if the cause is worthy of it, which I think the question of abandoning the garrisons is."

At 2 P.M. on September 30th Gordon closes the second book of his Journal, and an hour later the steamers start for Shendy, or Berber, as circumstances may determine. More than half his defensive, and probably three-fourths of his offensive power went with those four steamers. Two thousand men was the equivalent estimate he had put upon each boat. Already weak enough in holding this far-extending position, he will be henceforward doubly weak in the absence of the means of moving troops and guns quickly from place to place along the waterways of the two rivers.

In one of the four great books of Chinese philosophy there is given the definition of a man who, "knowing neither sorrow nor fear, walks alone all confident in his courage. Such a man," says the sage, "although he may love life will love something better than life, and although he may hate death will hate something more than death." This description of a perfect man was written more than two thousand years ago, but if there still are to be found in the great Empire of the East men who fulfil the definition, the name of "Chinese" Gordon, given for other reasons to this soldier, who now stands in Khartoum "alone and all confident in his courage," had warranty greater even than feat of arms or forecast of campaign could give it.

October ran its course with little change of situation until its 21st day. It was the New Year of the Arab Calendar 1302, and it was marked by two events of great importance. On that date the Mahdi arrived before Khartoum, and the first authentic information of the loss of the steamer *Abbas*, the death of Stewart, of the consuls, and the capture of all the papers, was sent to Gordon. He received this fatal news on the morning of the 22d, but he still hopes against hope. "It would be terrible if it is true," he writes. Later in the day a despatch comes in from the Mahdi giving the fullest particulars of the captured correspondence; every document taken is noted, numbered, and neatly given in *précis*.

The New Year of the Moslems has indeed dawned gloomily upon this solitary Christian soldier, but all this has been long ago forecast in his mind, and he telegraphs back to Omderman, from whence the news has come, this message: "Tell the Mahdi that it is all one to me whether he has captured 20,000 steamers like the *Abbas*, or 20,000 officers like Stewart Pacha. I hope to see the newly-arrived English, but if Mahomet Achmet says the English die it is all the same to me. I am here like iron.' Here like iron—like the old "spear" whose name he bore.

From this day forward the pressure of the siege by the Arabs became more determined. It was now a race between the Mahdi and the expedition for the possession of Khartoum. Among the papers captured in the *Abbas* were some which gave the fullest details of all stores and food remaining in the city on September 9th. The exact strength of garrison and population were also

stated. The Arabs could therefore calculate to a day how long the place could hold out. It was ardebs of dhurra against miles of distance.

Where was the expedition on this Moslem New Year's Day, this 21st of October? It was still at Wadi Halfa, six hundred miles distant, struggling with congested transport, lack of coal at Assouan, broken-down railway, and administrative machinery not yet running smooth in work. Two hundred English boats have indeed reached that point, but they were waiting at the foot of the second cataract, while some fifty or sixty native craft were being passed through that formidable obstruction, and a full fortnight has to pass ere the first company of infantry will be embarked for Khartoum.

Still with clouds gathering closer around, with symptoms of desertion and treachery daily increasing in the garrison, and with the incessant wear of watching growing more intense, as enemies multiplied within and without, we search in vain through the Journals for any trace of despondency, or for even the slackness of physical exhaustion. In the twenty days of September which the Journals cover, Gordon wrote eighty pages of closely printed matter: in the thirty-one days of October he wrote almost one hundred pages. Often for long pages together he seems to forget all about his own sombre surroundings, his mind is busy discussing the future of the Soudan, his memory recalls the mistakes that have led to the deplorable condition of affairs in Egypt, and through forecast or memory the brightness of his humour seldom ceases to shine out amid the clouds that encompass him. Still never a word to the gallery, no thought of that immense audience which so soon will be trying to people

with vain imaginings these big lonely palace rooms where he sits at work, and over and over again he repeats the thought that Plutarch's *Lives* are out of print in our generation, and that come what may there is still a joy in store for him that not even the conquest of Khartoum can take from him; that whether he lives or dies he will not in the future have again to endure the misery of the selfish civility of English society. "I would sooner live like a dervish with the Mahdi than go out to dinner every night in London," he writes on the two hundred and twenty-sixth day of the siege of Khartoum.

Early in November matters begin to look a little brighter so far as the chances of relief of the garrison are concerned. On November 2d stock of provisions is taken, and it is found that there is still enough for six weeks' consumption; "then the sponge must be thrown up," is the significant comment. Will he put the troops on half rations? No, because the faith of officers and men is already weak enough, and the wholesale desertion which would follow short commons would bring catastrophe before its time. Already the Sheikh el-Islam, the Cadi, and the Mudir have been intriguing with the Mahdi; the black soldiers are now the last stay, and if they are pinched for food they will desert. Next day, November 3d, a steamer arrives from Shendy, bringing letters from Dongola; there can no longer be doubt about the wreck of the *Abbas*, and the murder of Stewart, Power, and Herbin. The other news is meagre enough, but it looks definite. There is a letter from Debbeh, dated October 14th. Lord Wolseley is at Wadi Halfa. The expedition will start from Dongola

on or about November 1st. Major Kitchener, the writer of this letter, encloses an Arabic cipher telegram from Lord Wolseley of September 20th, but unfortunately the key to the cipher has been taken by Stewart, and the telegram remains unread.

For three days following the receipt of these letters Gordon's mind is too engrossed with the murder of his late companions to give much thought to other subjects. He reviews in the Journal every circumstance relating to their journey. "*If Abbas was captured by treachery, then I am not to blame,*" he writes. "*Neither am I to blame if she struck a rock,* for she drew under two feet of water, and fifty boats (sailing) used to go down yearly to Cairo with high Nile; *if they were attacked and overpowered then I am to blame,* for I ought to have foreseen the chance and prevented their going." Then he relates every event leading up to the departure of the officers. He had resolved upon sending the *Abbas* down to Dongola under charge of an Arab *ries* (captain), then—

"Herbin asked to be allowed to go. I jumped at his offer. Then Stewart said he would go if I would exonerate him from deserting me. I said you do not desert me. I—I cannot go, but if you go you do me a great service. I then wrote him an official. He wanted me to write him an order. I said no, for though I fear not responsibility, I will not put you in any danger in which I am not in myself. I wrote them a letter couched thus: '*Abbas* is going down. You say you are willing to go in her if I think you can do so with honour.—You can go in honour, for you can do nothing here, and if you go you do me service in telegraphing my views.'"

Finally he sums up the disaster thus: "I look on it as being a Nemesis on the death of the two Pachas."

With the exception of this confirmation of previous rumours regarding the *Abbas*, and the definite tidings about the expedition, there was no other information by this important post. The few letters which it brought had, however, been wrapped up in some old newspapers. The wrapper was thrown aside upon arrival. Some person chanced to pick it up, and seeing the papers were English brought them to the apothecary of the hospital, who happened to know English. Finally the Greek doctor noticed them, and at last these precious glimpses of the outside world found their way into Gordon's hands. "They are like gold," he writes, "as you may imagine, since we have had no news since February 24th, 1884!" Chief among the news given in these London papers of September 15th, 1884, were items referring to the progress of the "Gordon Relief Expedition." This definition of the object of the Nile Expedition added another sting to the many he had already endured. "*No!*" he writes in capital letters—"for the relief of the Soudan garrisons." Again and again he repudiates the idea that the "relief" is for him. "I am not the rescued lamb, and I will not be," he had long ago said. Now in the seeming light of this certainty that the expedition is to relieve him he makes a declaration of intention with so much force and iteration that it is clear he has formed in his mind a new resolution. Of this resolution we shall have something to say further on.

As the month of November progresses, the siege is everywhere more closely pressed by the Arabs. On the 12th they began at dawn a determined attack upon Omderman, and on the steamers *Ismailia* and *Hussi-*

neych. These two little "penny steamers" are repeatedly struck by shells, and at last the *Hussineyeh* has to be run aground to prevent her sinking. There are a few lines in the Journal describing this day's work which bring very vividly to the mind the last hundred days of this long-protracted agony :—

"One tumbles at 3 A.M. into a troubled sleep. A drum beats—tup ! tup ! tup ! It comes into a dream, but after a few moments one becomes more awake, and it is revealed to the brain that one is in Khartoum. The next query is where is this tup-tupping going on ? A hope arises it will die away again. No ; it goes on, and increases in intensity. The thought strikes one have they enough ammunition (the excuse of bad soldiers). One exerts oneself. At last it is no use, up one must get, and go on to the roof of the palace. Then telegrams, orders, swearing, and cursing goes on till 9 A.M. Men may say what they like about glorious war, but to me it is a horrid nuisance (if it is permitted to say anything is a nuisance which comes on us). I saw that poor little beast, the *Hussineyeh* (a Thames launch), fall back, stern foremost, under a terrific fire of breech-loaders. I saw a shell strike the water at her bows ; I saw her stop and puff off steam, and then I gave the glass to my boy, *sickened unto death ;* and my thoughts turned on —— more than on any one, and I will say they were not beneficent towards him. My boy (he is thirty) said, '*Hussineyeh* is sick.' I knew it but said quietly, 'Go down and telegraph to Mogrim, Is *Hussineyeh* sick ?'"

Alas ! the little sister-boat to the *Abbas* was not only sick but dying, and now there is left but one boat, the *Ismailia*, to cover all the water-way of the two rivers. The expenditure of ammunition is forty thousand rounds a day, but as there is fifty days' supply of shell and rifle cartridges in store at this rate of consumption, and as the limit of food will be reached in

thirty days, it does not matter. "I feel quite indifferent," he writes, "for if not relieved before a month our food-supply fails, and I like to go down with our colours flying." The day after this, the 13th, the Arabs send a force to the north side of the city, completely hemming in Khartoum. They have also established themselves between Omderman and the river isolating that fort.

During the remainder of November the hopeless work goes on. On the 22d Gordon draws a sketch of his position, and sums up his losses. He has had eighteen hundred or nineteen hundred men killed and two hundred and forty-two wounded. Then he writes in italics some very memorable words:—

"If the expedition comes here before the place falls (which is doubtful), and *if the instructions are to evacuate the place at once and leave Kassala and Sennaar, etc., I will resign and have nothing more to do with the government of the place or of the Soudan*, and this I have a perfect right to do, and no one, not even the Soudan troops or people, could say one word. It will depend on circumstances how I shall act *in re* my commission in Her Majesty's service (which I do not hold too fast to, seeing any future employment would not be accepted even if, in the very improbable case of its being offered), but I consider that every officer has a right to resign, and if he resigns he is no longer subject to military orders, AND IS FREE TO GO WHEN AND WHERE HE LIKES."

Then he goes on to say that he was named Governor-General "in order to carry out evacuation of the Soudan," against which "he has nothing to say, but he was not named Governor-General in order to run away from Khartoum, and leave the garrisons elsewhere to their fate." These words, written immediately underneath a plan of the city, showing in detail the positions

occupied by the enemy, and therefore certain to catch the eye of any incoming general, give the clue to much that will be important later on. When this entry was made in the Journal Gordon believed the advanced position of the expedition to be at or near Metemma. Three days later, on the 25th, he receives news that the English force is still at Ambukol, nearly two hundred miles farther off, and with all the Bayuda yet to cross.

At last November, like so many other previous months, has closed, and still the sole tidings from the outside world are of remote relief. More than a year has gone by since the news of the annihilation of the army of Hicks Pacha at Kazghil was known in Cairo, and in that long interval exactly nine men have been sent from Egypt to Khartoum. Well would it have been for us if the expedition on this last day of November had been even within one hundred miles of Ambukol. It was in reality many a hundred miles farther away. On November 30th one solitary boat had alone passed the Third Cataract, the six hundred others were labouring slowly under the enormous burthen of food they were carrying amid the "Womb of Rocks."

December comes. All the long threads of disaster are gathering into a closer cord of doom. On the 5th Omderman fort is still safe. There are twenty-one thousand pounds of dhurra and one hundred and twenty-one thousand okes of biscuits still in store in Khartoum; but desertion among the garrison grows greater, and the long-deferred hope of relief is making the weak heart of the defence beat weaker day by day. The entries in the Journal are getting shorter. In

November there were seventy pages written; in these December days the entries do not more than fill a page each day, and the record is ever of a lessening food-supply. "Truly I am worn to a shadow with the food question," he writes on December 10th; "it is one continued demand." Then comes the significant entry, "five men deserted to-day." The sand in the hour-glass is running very low. There is not fifteen days' food in the whole town.

On December 14th the steamer *Bordeen* will return to Shendy. Why? Because the town may now fall at any moment, and the last messages have to be sent out ere the fatal hour strikes. So, on December 14th, 1884, the Journal is closed, and final farewells are written to many old friends. "As it seems impossible we shall meet again in this world," he writes to one steadfast friend,[1] "I would ask you to see that my family do not lose by my death." Then follows a list of sums due to the English Foreign Office, the Cairo Government, and the King of the Belgians—in all four thousand five hundred and six pounds, "which I should have met," he goes on, "by leaving Her Majesty's army, and asking the King of the Belgians to give me compensation for the same. However, as it seems all this is at an end, I do not think it too much for Her Majesty's Government to pay Cairo what I owe it, £2100; and also King of the Belgians, £570; and to take any pay due to me against the sum I owe Foreign Office. I know you will see to this."[2] Then he writes

[1] Lord Wolseley.

[2] These debts may require a few words of explanation. When Gordon accepted the Soudan mission in January 1884 he had no

other letters—one to his sister, in which he tells her he is "quite happy, thank God!" and, "like Lawrence, I have *tried* to do my duty;" and again he writes to Lord Wolseley, recommending to his notice one "Abdul Hamed Bey as the best young fellow I have met in the Soudan." To another friend he speaks very quietly of "the catastrophe," so soon to take place, "which would not have happened if our people had taken better precautions as to informing us of their movements; but this is 'spilt milk.' Good-bye." The last entry in the

money. He had, in fact, to borrow a few pounds from the King of the Belgians in order to come to London after the receipt of Lord Wolseley's telegram. When Gordon came out from his interview with the Ministers the fact of his poverty was discovered by Lord Wolseley putting the direct question to him, "Have you any money?" It was then after bank hours, and as Gordon was to leave for the Soudan at eight P.M. there was not much time to procure a requisite sum. Borrowing ten or twenty pounds here and there, Lord Wolseley got together two hundred pounds in a bag, which he handed to Gordon as the train was about to start from Charing Cross. Eight days later Gordon met at Ismailia an old Soudan servant—one Mahomed Tuhami—who had formerly been his secretary at Khartoum, but who was now old, blind, and in poverty. He gave this man one hundred sovereigns from the bag, and passed on to Cairo. Between that day and December 14th following he increased this debt of two hundred pounds to eighteen hundred and thirty-six pounds, which he owes to the Foreign Office, and to a further sum of two thousand one hundred pounds due to Cairo. The five hundred and seventy pounds to the King of the Belgians was evidently of older date. How these amounts were spent is easy enough to conjecture. There can be little doubt they went as the one hundred pounds went at Ismailia, in the relief of want and suffering, or in payment of messengers and servants. Many men would have considered such drops of expenditure might well go into the ocean of Soudan cost, but Gordon charges himself with every farthing, and amid a thousand troubles asks his old friend to "see to this" for him.

Journal can never be forgotten: "I have done the best for the honour of our country. Good-bye. You send me no information though you have lots of money." Very sorrowful, yet very wonderful evidences these of the nature now shining forth so strong in the quick gathering gloom of death. There may be sadder pages in our history, but I have not read them.

The *Bordeen* sailed on the night of December 14th, and then silence settled for ever over Khartoum. For forty-three days following the departure of the steamer the hopeless work still drags on. During fifteen days there is a daily lessening issue of food given out, and then actual starvation begins; everything that can keep the light of life flickering a little longer in these wretched frames is tried—rats and mice, the leather of boots, the straps and plaited strips of skin of native bedsteads, gum of mimosa, the inner fibre of the palm tree, have all been eagerly devoured. Fifteen thousand of the townspeople have been sent out to the camp of the Mahdi. Great numbers have died; there are only some fourteen thousand inhabitants now remaining in the city. Daily and nightly the enemy presses his attack. Omderman has fallen, the circle of the Arab leaguer is clasped tighter around the famished garrison, and many among the Egyptian officers and officials are clamouring for surrender. These particulars we know from the collected accounts of soldiers and slaves who escaped the final catastrophe. We know, too, from the accounts of these men that through all this terrible time the heart of Charles Gordon never wavered, and that up to the very brink of the last scene he stood the sole stay of the defence, the head and front of the defending—refusing all idea of surrender, still toiling to

the last, still "doing his best for the honour of the country" which he thinks has forgotten him in his agony, but which now would willingly give her best blood and spend her last treasure to save him.

One help he has through all this time that never leaves him. "The Almighty God will help me," he wrote in the last message that ever came to us. Yes, that Help he has to the last moment of this crucifixion—to the last step of the long ladder which is leading him to a double immortality. For twenty years past he has asked that the end might thus come to him. Away in those dim deserts to the west, beyond where the sun goes down behind the smoke of the Arab leaguer, he has scores of times in past years almost sought death in the obscure strife of this weary Soudan world; once and again has he prayed of heaven the boon of death, if by his sacrifice the load of human misery might be lightened, the sum of human wrong-doing might be lessened;—it was not to be *then*. He was to come back again and again to the nation that seemed to care so little for him; and amid the babble of the street, or in the chatter of the club, the faith, the generosity, and the matchless honesty of the man were to be ridiculed or explained away as the aberrations of an over-excited mind.

And now he is to come back to us no more; the order has gone forth which is to heighten his glory and deepen our shame; the sacrifice so often offered is accepted; the narrow gate is at last thrown open, and amid a flood of such light as God seldoms lets fall upon the face of man, we are to see this last great Christian hero vanish from our world.

To the resolution which he had formed on November

14th, of resigning his commission on the approach of the expedition if the relief of all the garrisons in the Soudan was not intended, he adhered to the last moment. There can be no doubt that the one steamer remaining to him, the *Ismailia*, was kept with steam up day and night, so as to be ready to start up Nile at a moment's notice, when the arrival of the expedition would have enabled him by signal or otherwise to hand over the command of the city to the incoming general. It was this fact of the *Ismailia* having steam up on the night of the final Arab assault which lay at the root of the vague hope that existed for months after the fall of the city, that Gordon had escaped to the equator by the White Nile. From the date of the sailing of the steamer *Bordeen* on December 14th to the end of the month he seems to have sent out several messengers with the words, "Khartoum all right. Could hold out for years," written on very small scraps of paper. The only explanation yet given of these messages is that they were meant to deceive the Arabs, into whose hands they would probably fall, but this reason seems improbable. Gordon knew too well how accurate was the knowledge possessed by the Arabs of the true condition of the town. It seems to be much more probable that he judged the Mahdi would permit the bearers of these written words to proceed to their destination, because the messages were calculated to delay the English advance, and that by this means the verbal messages with which the men were charged, and which were of a widely different purport, might be safely conveyed to the expedition. Where meanwhile was the expedition?

On the day when Gordon was writing the last entry in his Journal, December 14th, the leading troops in boats and on camels reached Korti, a village on the left bank of the Nile, which marks the point of departure from the river of the desert-track to Metemma. At this place troops and supplies were concentrated during the next sixteen days, and on December 30th the first advance into the Bayuda was made from Korti. But the progress across the desert was a slow one. In order to make up for a marked deficiency of camels the first advance was only continued to Jakdul, little more than half-way on the road to Metemma. Here large natural cisterns of water existed in the rocks of Gebil Giliff, and at these pools a depot was formed, while the camels returned again to Korti to move a second detachment of men and stores from that place. When this had been done, and the entire column was concentrated at Jakdul, it was January 12th. But the camels, worn by this triple march, from Korti to Jakdul, from Jakdul to Korti, and again from Korti to Jakdul, a total distance of three hundred miles in fourteen days, were now exhausted, and sixty hours had to pass before the advance towards Metemma could be again continued.

On the evening of January 14th the entire column moved from Jakdul; on the 17th it fought the Arabs at the wells of Abu Klea; on the 19th it fought a second time near Metemma, and on the evening of the same day the advance touched the Nile at Gubat. By the evening of the 20th the entire column was collected on the left shore of the river, about three miles south of Metemma. The daylight of the

next morning brought the four steamers, which had been waiting near this place for one hundred and twelve days, and communication was at last effected between them and the expedition. This was on the morning of January 21st, 1885.[1]

[1] The interval of three days which elapsed between the arrival of the desert column at the Nile and the departure of the steamers under Sir Charles Wilson for Khartoum has been the subject of much controversy and some severe comment. That days were lost in the long effort which began in London on August 12th and ended at Khartoum on January 28th cannot now be doubted. Perhaps it was unavoidable that there should have been delay in the prosecution of such a gigantic enterprise; but when history reviews the final pause of three days on the Nile shore at Gubat it must be careful to hold level the balance of judgment. The operation between Gubat and Khartoum was recognised to be pre-eminently a naval one. For its preparation and exact execution an officer of high naval rank had been specially selected to accompany the desert column from Korti. The orders given to this officer were clear and precise. On arrival at Metemma he was "at once to take over and man any steamer, or steamers, that were either there or in the vicinity," and he was to "use every means in his power to get one or more of the steamers into an efficient state." Delays in the operation of war seem always inexplicable to the outside reader who knows nothing of the innumerable causes which impede the continuous flow of execution in the field. Whether there was unnecessary delay at Gubat in preparing the steamers for the journey which was to complete the final link in the long chain of effort, or whether an earlier start might have been effected, is not the purpose of the present writer to determine, but one thing should be placed beyond the region of dispute, and that thing is—that the responsibility of this delay, whatever it may be, should not be borne alone by the officer who has hitherto had to sustain it, but should be shared, at least equally, by the naval officer to whom was specially entrusted at Korti the preparation of the steamers for the journey to Khartoum, and whose execution of that duty was not completed until late in the afternoon of January 23d, the evening previous to the morning on which the actual start was made.

On the morning of the 24th two of the steamers started for Khartoum, carrying Sir Charles Wilson and a small detachment of English soldiers of the Thirty-fifth or Sussex Regiment. The distance these steamers had to traverse was one hundred miles, but about midway in that interval the Sixth Cataract begins, and the Nile flows for twelve miles through narrow, rock-encumbered channels. It was nearly mid-day on January 28th before the boats, having cleared the cataract, approached the north end of the Isle of Tuti, from whence Khartoum can first be seen on the level point of land between the Blue and White Niles. As the steamers drew slowly on into the broad water which still shows the unmixed currents of the two rivers, every glass was fixed upon the palace, that large, square build-ing, whose flat roof, raised high above other houses, was conspicuous over all,—there was no flag flying. Another half-hour passes, the boats are now abreast of the centre of the island; the city is in full view. Still no flag waves on the palace-roof; no sign of welcome comes from a long-expectant garrison, but hostile guns are opening fire upon the steamers, and the crackle of musketry is spreading farther along the shores until, reaching the houses of the city that are nearest to the water, it completes the circle of the enemy's shot around the approaching boats. On the shores of isle and main-land, and over the sandy point below the town, crowds of men wearing the strange uniform and waving the battle-flags of the Mahdi are visible, and between the roar of cannon and the rattle of small arms [illegible] sand shrill shouts of Arab-triumph tell that [illegible] in Khartoum.

This is what had happened: Three hours before daybreak on January 26th the Arabs made a final assault upon the lines. Of the details of this last attack we know very little. We know that the sight of the wounded from the battle of Abu Klea, who had been brought to the camp of the Mahdi, produced a profound effect upon the Baggara and other fighting tribes of the army. These men, inflamed at the appearance of their stricken comrades, loudly demanded to be led at once against the city. The attack, delivered under a chosen leader in the darkest hour of the early morning, was directed against the lines near the gates of Bourré and Mesalamieh. On this morning of Monday, January 26th, the moon, just past its first quarter, set at one o'clock. From that hour until the earliest dawn profound darkness wrapped the dying city and the hostile camps. It is certain that the Arabs, as they approached the ramparts, were met by the feeblest resistance. Hunger had now brought to the lowest point the spirit of a garrison never strong, but whether actual treachery added its black help to famine, or whether the wretched soldiery fell back from the parapets in panic before the first onset of the enemy, will probably never be accurately known. Once the lines were gained by the Arabs, the city lay at the mercy of its assailants. Shortly before daybreak they appear to have advanced cautiously into the town, and as the winter dawn was breaking they reached the neighbourhood of the palace. Here, certain that the entire city was now in their possession, they gave vent to those shrill shouts of triumph with which the soldiers of Islam celebrate victory. It was at this

hour, just as day was breaking, that Gordon, roused from one of those short and troubled slumbers which for months had been his only rest, quitted the palace and moved, at the head of a small party of soldiers and servants, towards the Church of the Austrian Mission. This building lay to the east of the palace, from which it was separated by an open space of ground. Some months earlier the church had been made the reserve magazine of the town; the surrounding houses were cleared from its vicinity, and it had been silently selected as the spot where a last desperate resistance might be maintained if ever the final moment of the defence of Khartoum should arrive.

That supreme moment had now indeed come.

Walking a few yards in advance of his party, which did not number more than twenty men, Gordon drew near the church. The short and mysterious dawn of the desert was passing into broader day—over the palm trees on the edge of the Blue Nile the eastern sky was flushed with the red of the coming sun. From the lost town, still lying in shadow to the right, the shouts of a victorious enemy and the cries of a perishing people rose in deeper volume of sound. Ere yet the little band of footmen had crossed the open space between palace and church, a body of Arabs issued from a neighbouring street. For a moment the two parties stood almost face to face, then a volley of musketry flashed out at close range, in the yet uncertain light, and the bravest and noblest soldier of our time was no more.

Thus fell in dark hour of defeat a man as [illegible] as Sidney, of courage dauntless as Wolfe, of [illegible]

stainless as Outram, of sympathy wide-reaching as Drummond, of honesty straightforward as Napier, of faith as steadfast as More. Doubtful indeed is it if anywhere in the past we shall find figure of knight or soldier to equal him, for sometimes it is the sword of death that gives to life its real knighthood, and too often the soldier's end is unworthy of his knightly life; but with Gordon the harmony of life and death was complete, and the closing scenes seem to move to their fulfilment in solemn hush, as though an unseen power watched over the sequence of their sorrow.

Not by the blind hazard of chance was this great tragedy consummated; not by the discord of men or from the vague opposition of physical obstacle, by fault of route or length of delay, was help denied to him. The picture of a wonderful life had to be made perfect by heroic death. The moral had to be cut deep, and written red, and hung high, so that its lesson could be seen by all men above strife and doubt and discord. Nay, the very setting of the final scenes has to be wrought out in such contrast of colour that the dullest eye shall be able to read the meaning of it all. For many a year back this soldier's life has been a protest against our most cherished teaching. Faith is weakness, we have said. He will show us it is strength. Reward is the right of service. Publicity is true fame. Let us go into action with a newspaper-correspondent riding at our elbow, or sitting in the cabin of the ship, has been our practice. He has told us that the race should be for honour, not for "honours," that we should "give away [illegible]," and that courage and humility, mercy and [illegible] should march hand in hand together. For

many a year we have had no room for him in our councils. Our armies knew him not; and it was only in semi-savage lands and in the service of remote empires he could find scope for his genius. Now our councils will be shamed in his service, and our armies will find no footing in our efforts to reach him. We have said that the Providence of God was only a calculation of chances; now for eleven months the amazing spectacle will be presented to the world of this solitary soldier standing at bay, within thirty days' travel of the centre of Empire, while the most powerful kingdom on the earth—the nation whose wealth is as the sands of the sea, whose boast is that the sun never sets upon its dominions—is unable to reach him—saving, *he* does not want—but is unable to reach him even with one message of regret for past forgetfulness.

No; there is something more in all this than mistake of Executive, or strife of party, or error of Cabinet, or fault of men can explain. The purpose of this life that has been, the lesson of this death that must be, is vaster and deeper than these things. The decrees of God are as fixed to-day as they were two thousand years ago, but they can be worked to their conclusion by the weakness of men as well as by the strength of angels.

There is a gray frontlet of rock far away in Strathspey—once the Gordons' home—whose name in bygone times gave a rallying-call to a kindred clan. The scattered firs and wind-swept heather on the lone summit of Craig Ellachie once whispered in Highland clansmen's ear the war-cry, "Stand fast! Craig Ellachie!". Many a year has gone by since kith of Charles Gordon

last heard from Highland hilltop the signal of battle, but never in Celtic hero's long record of honour has such answer been sent back to Highland or to Lowland as when this great heart stopped its beating, and lay "steadfast unto death" in the dawn at Khartoum. The winds that moan through the pine trees on Craig Ellachie have far-off meanings in their voices. Perhaps on that dark January night there came a breath from heaven to whisper to the old Highland rock, "He stood fast! Craig Ellachie."

The dust of Gordon is not laid in English earth, nor does even the ocean, which has been named Britannia's realm, hold in "its vast and wandering grave" the bones of her latest hero. Somewhere, far out in the immense desert whose sands so often gave him rest in life, or by the shores of that river which was the scene of so much of his labour, his ashes now add their wind-swept atoms to the mighty waste of the Soudan. But if England, still true to the long line of her martyrs to duty, keep his memory precious in her heart—making of him no false idol of pride or brazen image of glory, but holding him as he was, the mirror and measure of true knighthood—then better than in effigy or epitaph will his life be written, and his nameless tomb become a citadel to his nation.

THE END

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